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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 (*continued*)

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: I first give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Sumiko Iwao, Chairperson of the delegation of Japan.

Mrs. Iwao (Japan): It is an honour to address this special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". These meetings are of the utmost significance for both women and men the world over. On behalf of the Japanese Government, I would like to commend those who have contributed so much to the preparations for this session, including all the non-governmental organizations.

In responding to the changing socio-economic situation, and with a view to making the twenty-first century truly peaceful and prosperous, it is imperative for us to build a gender-equal society in which women and men can fully exercise their individuality and abilities. We must act to achieve both *de jure* and de facto gender equality. Our efforts should be guided by the need to ensure the empowerment of women and respect for the rights of women, and to demonstrate a strong political will and actions based on partnership.

The empowerment of women plays a central role in the achievement of gender equality. In Japan, the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society, enacted in June 1999, stipulates positive actions. As part of our efforts towards gender mainstreaming, the Japanese Government is promoting the collection of gender-disaggregated data and the quantitative assessment of unpaid work, and has begun to develop a methodology for gender-based monitoring and evaluation of government policies.

The involvement of women in the decision-making process and in political activities is especially important for their empowerment. Since the Beijing Conference, many Japanese women have been elected to national and regional legislative bodies, and this year, for the first time, women were elected governors in two prefectures. We welcome these developments, which have opened new horizons for women's political empowerment in Japan.

For economic empowerment to be achieved, support for women's equal participation in economic activities is vital. The Japanese Government has been promoting measures to guarantee equal opportunities and treatment for women and men in employment, as well as reinforcing vocational training and supporting entrepreneurial activities by women. In rural areas, we are providing support for women's participation in the management of agriculture, forestry and fisheries. In order to deal with Japan's declining birth rate and

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ageing society, we are promoting an environment that will make possible a balance between life inside and outside the family, while both women and men assume roles in caring for children and the elderly.

Japan, as the top official development assistance donor for nine consecutive years, attaches particular importance to addressing poverty and all other issues relating to the protection of women's dignity and livelihoods through the empowerment of women. We will continue to support women in developing countries by including a gender perspective in the humanitarian and development assistance process and placing emphasis on women's education, health, and participation in socio-economic activities.

Japan has recently decided to provide, within the international framework, a 100 per cent reduction, not only in official development assistance debt, but also in non-official development assistance debt, and to contribute an additional amount of up to $200 million to the Debt Reduction Fund of the World Bank. We hope that the developing countries will make effective use of such debt relief for poverty reduction.

Women's empowerment through education and the overcoming of gender-stereotyped ideas is a long-term challenge. Japan will continue to provide lifelong learning with a gender-equality perspective to promote changes in individual consciousness.

True gender equality cannot be achieved without respect for women's rights. Violence against women poses a serious threat to the women of the world, and the need to strengthen our efforts is widely recognized. Japan will continue its efforts to eradicate violence against and sexual harassment of women by taking measures to prevent such actions and to protect victims, as well as by enforcing existing laws, conducting surveys and enacting further appropriate legislation. We will endeavour to ensure reproductive rights and health throughout a women's life span by providing health services appropriate to every stage of life.

We attach great importance to the adoption of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which will contribute to the well-being of children. In Japan, the Law for Punishing Acts Related to Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Protecting Children was enacted in November last year, and action is being taken to enforce it. As a further manifestation of our commitment to the eradication of the sexual exploitation of children, Japan will host the Second World Congress Against Commercial and Other Forms of Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama in December 2001, in cooperation with UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and ECPAT International (End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking in Children for Sexual Purposes).

The Government's strong political will and action, based on partnership, are essential in achieving gender equality. Thus, in accordance with the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society, the Japanese Government will formulate the Basic Plan for Gender Equality within the year 2000 and actively implement it through the national machinery, which will be greatly reinforced in January of next year. In this regard, the Japanese Government will continue to attach particular importance to partnership with non-governmental organizations.

As a result of ongoing globalization and progress in information technology, our daily lives and social systems are undergoing a period of major change. Increasing communication of ideas between people is bringing about new thinking and values not wedded to the past. Ultimately, individuals are the main actors in society, and it is they who change society. Thus, the present time offers an ideal opportunity to correct gender inequality, a problem of long standing. The realization of a gender-equal society is significant in the context of promoting the human-centred approach, as articulated in the Millennium Report of the Secretary-General. It is our strong hope that this special session, along with the Millennium Summit, will be a major milestone in the ongoing effort to improve the status of women. For its part, Japan pledges to contribute to successful discussions of the issue that this session is set to address and to promote gender equality worldwide.

The President: I next give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Zinatun Nesa Talukdar, State Minister for Women's and Children's Affairs of Bangladesh.

Mrs. Talukdar (Bangladesh): Five years back, in Beijing, we committed ourselves to a global agenda to achieve the goals of equality, peace and development for women. Today, we take stock of how far we have been successful in achieving these goals. I am aware

there is a time limit for speakers, so I will only highlight a few important issues.

We in Bangladesh continue to be inspired by the noble vision of the Father of our Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for women's advancement and empowerment. We have made sincere and all-out efforts to keep the commitments we made in Beijing. Following the Conference, a National Policy for Advancement of Women was adopted in Bangladesh to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. Other institutional mechanisms, such as the National Council for Women's Development, the Parliamentary Standing Committee for the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, the Women's Development Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, the Women in Development (WID) Focal Points Mechanism and a District Coordination Committee were also established. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs was strengthened and designated as the focal point to coordinate our efforts. A Women in Development component has been introduced for gender mainstreaming in the national development process, addressing the feminization of poverty and making our women more self-reliant. Through the personal commitment of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the Ashrayon (home for homeless) programme and Old Age Pension for vulnerable women have been introduced. In addition, the Vulnerable Group Development Programme for five million housewives, and other innovative programmes, such as micro-credit schemes, have proved successful.

Realizing the importance of the education of women, we have introduced free primary education, Food for Education and special stipends for girls. These measures have contributed to increasing girls' literacy and addressing the high drop-out rate. The female literacy rate has increased from 34.2 to 49.5 percent from 1995 to 2000.

Similar emphasis has been placed on health. The Government has approved a comprehensive health policy under the Health and Population Sector Programme; it has integrated health and family welfare services, with special focus on vulnerable women and children, and this has been successful. Other major programmes include "Women Friendly Hospital", Emergency Obstetric Care and Upgrading Mother and Child Care. These have had an important impact on the maternal mortality rate; the rate per 1,000 live births has come down from 4.5 to 3 from 1996 to 1998.

Although much remains to be done to enhance the participation of women in politics, we have made progress. In Bangladesh, both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition are women. At present, we have 11 per cent women's representation in the Parliament. At the local elections held in 1997, 12,828 women candidates were elected.

Despite continuous efforts to combat violence against women, this remains a problem. The Ministry of Women's and Children Affairs, along with other relevant agencies, has undertaken a multisectoral project to establish "one-stop" crisis centres. The present Government, under the able leadership and guidance of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has enacted new laws to address women's human rights. The adoption of the Prevention of Women's and Children's Repression Act 2000 in January this year will act as a strong base for protecting women's human rights and eliminating violence.

We recognize the potential of our girl child. The Government is fully committed to improving the condition of children, with special focus on the girl child. The National Plan of Action for Children has been adopted, with specific programmes identified for this purpose.

While primary responsibility is placed on national Governments to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the international community, the United Nations system and other international organizations, as well as civil society, must complement national and global efforts for women's empowerment. The United Nations system needs to do more in a coordinated manner to provide support to government efforts, with particular attention to the least developed countries.

At this special session, Bangladesh renews the commitments it made in Beijing. We would like to carry back important lessons for further actions and initiatives. We pledge ourselves to achieving gender equality and to making the world a better place for women in the new millennium.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women in Australia.

Ms. Newman (Australia): Five years ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women, Australia joined with some 189 Member States to affirm our commitment to women. This forum provides a unique opportunity for us to learn from and build on one another's experiences since that time and to renew our efforts to address the challenges that remain.

I am honoured to be here today, as the Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women and leading the Australian delegation, to reflect on progress since Beijing and to join in working together to further advance opportunities for women throughout the world.

The Beijing Platform for Action was a rallying point for action for women's equality in all spheres. The Australian Government has worked hard to give practical effect to the Beijing principles and policy recommendations and has developed a powerful agenda for empowering women, firmly based on respect for women's equality and opportunities.

Our record of achievement stands as a testament to this. Twenty-five per cent of Australia's federal parliamentarians are women, nearly double the international average, and women occupy 31 per cent of positions on federal government boards. More women than men complete the final years of secondary education and enter university. Last year, women outnumbered men in undergraduate medical education courses for the very first time. Women are sharing in Australia's sound economic performance, benefiting from reforms to taxation, family assistance, support for those in need and more flexible retirement savings.

There are more women in paid work than ever before — a record high of 65 per cent of working-age women were in the paid workforce as of March this year. Women's unemployment is at its lowest level in 10 years and the gender gap in wages is at a record low of 15 per cent. Around 35 per cent of small business operators are women and the number of women in apprenticeships and traineeships has grown dramatically. From 1996 to 1999, there was an increase of almost 150 per cent, from 34,000 in 1996 to over 83,000 in 1999.

The number of child-care places increased from 269,000 in 1995 to a record high of 430,000 last year. There has been a decrease in the number of women who have died from breast cancer over the past two years. There is greater community awareness and less tolerance of violence against women than in the past. In this respect, the ban on guns was highly significant.

The Australian Government remains firmly committed to improving opportunities and choice for women. An effective government agenda to promote the status of women relies on good governance, fiscal responsibility and the involvement of all sectors of society — public, private and civil. Within this context, the Government is committed to a robust legal and institutional framework to protect women against discrimination and, through both targeted and mainstream policies, to provide practical support for women in paid and unpaid work. The Government's strategies include major economic reforms to improve the well-being of all Australians; educational partnerships across all levels of government and the business and community sectors to address social issues; and a strong focus on preventive strategies to tackle problems at their source.

Since 1996, Australia has introduced far-reaching economic reforms that are providing greater financial security for women. Women — whether they are single workers bringing up families or in retirement — all benefit from this dynamic economic environment. Australian women are benefiting from deregulation of the financial system, a stronger monetary policy framework, low inflation, low interest rates, better workplace relations and — from 1 July this year — a whole new taxation system. Women are benefiting from Australia's new workplace relations legislation, which enables employers and employees to sit down together to tailor flexible working arrangements to suit their needs. Women are now able to build family-friendly arrangements into their working conditions at the enterprise level. Reforms to superannuation are helping more women to plan for a secure retirement and to reduce the number of older women living in poverty.

The Government is also actively supporting employers to adopt better equal employment opportunity strategies, with an emphasis on education, facilitation and practical advice. Training programmes have been set up to help women re-enter the workforce, including familiarization with new information technologies. There are more women in leadership and more educational programmes to increase women's awareness of the political system. The new parenting payment, coupled with new and substantial tax cuts for women with young children, provides greater financial

independence, as well as recognition of women's valuable unpaid work in the home.

The spirit of cooperation so evident at Beijing recognized that all actors must work together if women's equality is to become a reality. Governments alone cannot deliver equality for women. Australia has introduced a powerful new social agenda founded on a social coalition. The Australian Government has taken the lead in building collaborative links with business and community groups, where each partner contributes its strengths and expertise to address social issues. The Australian approach emphasizes prevention as well as cure. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, introduced earlier this year, will support women in balancing work and family commitments and strengthen the communities in which they live by investing in community capacity-building at the local level.

Women in rural communities are benefiting from the delivery of health services specifically for rural women and more research into women's health needs.

Australia has undertaken far-reaching reforms to combat violence against women. The Government has introduced historic national gun controls and a national gun buy-back programme, to which I referred earlier. There has been a national campaign to prevent and address domestic violence, backed by the personal support of the Prime Minister, which emphasizes the need for new cooperative approaches focused on early intervention, testing and sharing new approaches and altering the attitudes and the behaviour of perpetrators. In 1998, Australia played a leading role in the development of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and helped ensure that sexual violence abuses such as rape, sexual slavery and enforced prostitution were included in the definition of war crimes.

Australia believes very much in harnessing the skills and talents of all members of our society if we are to build a better future. But we still have some way to go before women truly achieve equality.

The Government recognizes that Australia's extensive cultural diversity requires specialized measures to meet the concerns of women from these backgrounds and has introduced a range of initiatives to promote a harmonious Australia.

It is vital that Governments maintain their efforts to fight discrimination and harmful social attitudes so that women can reach their full potential.

Australia commends the valuable work that has already been done by Governments and other key actors around the world to empower women. I hope that the Beijing +5 political declaration and outcome document will contribute to an empowering agenda for women. Political commitment, partnerships across all actors and innovative "leading-edge" practices are powerful ingredients for empowering women.

In this regard, Australia hopes its own experience may be of interest and value to colleagues at this critical point five years after the Beijing Conference. We see this as a unique and important opportunity to share experiences and to move forward together.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Margareta Winberg, Minister for Gender Equality of Sweden.

Ms. Winberg (Sweden): In addition to what was stated by the Minister of Portugal on behalf of the European Union this morning, I would like to add the following.

The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action was a great achievement, but it has taken us only part of the way towards gender equality. This morning the Secretary-General demonstrated very clearly the present unequal situation we have in the world.

Let me also mention the unacceptable fact that, five years after Beijing, a recent analysis of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has demonstrated that gender accounts only for some 3 per cent of UNDP core expenditures.

Another alarming fact is that 25 years after the first United Nations Conference on women, only 10 to 12 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are women. The male structure persists.

The Nordic Governments and countries continue to be the exceptions. The Swedish Government, for example, has 11 female ministers out of 20, and women constitute 43 per cent of all parliamentarians. We have, however, recently been joined by South Africa, where firm actions by women in political parties have resulted in their obtaining a third of all seats in their Parliament. This shows that fundamental changes are possible,

provided there is political will and political commitment.

Now we all must ask ourselves if there is the political will to change in our countries and in the United Nations. The answer must be yes, because that is necessary for the full implementation of the actions enumerated in the Beijing Platform, and the United Nations must be in the forefront, setting normative targets and achieving the envisioned goals. The statement given by the Secretary-General this morning must be followed by action.

A key issue to this end is to ensure reproductive rights and services for women and men — in particular adolescents — which is a strategic part of our own policy for health development. It is extremely important for young people of both sexes to have access to relevant information and education, which should be given to them privately and confidentially, without the presence of their parents. In Sweden this has enabled adolescents to handle their sexuality in a responsible way, and the result has been fewer teen-age mothers and extremely good reproductive health. Information and education is also a precondition for combating HIV/AIDS.

Men's violence against women is a violation of women's rights and the worst expression of male dominance. It must be condemned and punished wherever it takes place, be it in public or in private. A broad range of measures are needed for an efficient struggle against gender-based violence in all its brutal forms: domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation and so-called honour killings — shame killings, as the Secretary-General said this morning. It is unacceptable that the life of a woman should be seen as less valuable than that of a man. It is our obligation to provide adequate support for the survivors of violence and to combat that violence. We need to develop methods for the treatment of men, but also methods for preventive work, and we must break the culture of silence that prevails among men.

In Sweden, thousands of men are networking to combat male violence against women. They are brave enough to speak up, not only to protest violence committed against women, but also to protest gender-based discrimination in general.

So far work for gender equality has focused far too little on the role of men. The Nordic Ministers would like to share some of the experiences we have gained in this area. I would therefore like to invite all participants to our seminar on "Men and Gender Equality" tomorrow at 3 p.m.

Without the active participation of men in the work for equality, we cannot reach our goal of creating equal societies. I therefore propose that in the near future we arrange an international conference on men and masculinity and on how men can cooperate with women and help us attain the goals set for this session: the promotion of gender equality, development and peace.

The President: I call on Mrs. Cristian Munduate, Minister of the Secretariat for Social Welfare of the Presidency of Guatemala.

Mrs. Munduate (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): Five years ago Guatemala endorsed a set of guidelines derived from the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women. The commitment to mainstreaming the gender perspective in public policies received renewed momentum from the conclusion of the Peace Agreements that brought to an end a conflict in my country that had lasted for almost four decades. This momentum was strengthened and revitalized by President Alfonso Portillo when he assumed office. His platform of government places great emphasis on issues relating generally to equity in general and to equity and equal opportunities for women in particular.

We cannot but be deeply committed to development and equity, considering that of the almost 11 million inhabitants of Guatemala 50.7 per cent are women, and approximately 70 per cent of the total population lives in poverty. Economic and social disparities in the country are particularly shocking with respect to girls and women, especially indigenous women living in rural areas. Deficiencies exist in the access of girls to the educational system. Women's illiteracy rate is 45 per cent, a situation that is particularly acute in indigenous communities. The maternal mortality rate is still at 190 out of 100,000 live births. Employment opportunities for women continue to be concentrated in the service, agricultural, manufacturing and commercial sectors. And although the participation of women in public life and in professional and entrepreneurial activities has increased, it is still very far from the desired level and from what is provided for in the Beijing Platform for Action.

Thus, in his inaugural speech, delivered on 14 January 2000, President Portillo highlighted his interest in energizing and supporting the development of Guatemalan women. Only two weeks ago a step of paramount importance was taken in the implementation of his presidential agenda with the establishment of the Secretariat for Women under the Presidency of the Republic. This office will coordinate State actions to mainstream public policies for the development of women and will function as the Government focal point for maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the rest of civil society.

Similarly, President Portillo's Government has established a series of goals and policies relating to women in the spheres of total health, illiteracy reduction, access to quality primary education, diversified training, employment and generation of income. With respect to the total health of women, we subscribe to the provisions of the Beijing Platform for Action as regards reproductive health, above all with respect to the right to information and the provision of services ensuring respect for freedom of choice.

Our commitment on all these issues goes beyond the creation of institutions. The objective of the Government of Guatemala for the next four years is to bring about an improvement in the standard and quality of life of girls and women in Guatemala.

Furthermore, the Peace Agreements, and particularly the Agreement on social and economic aspects and agrarian situation, set down concrete provisions that facilitate initiatives for the integral development of Guatemalan women and girls. These domestic efforts, and the commitments undertaken at the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as those enshrined in the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001, have resulted in specific actions that contribute to strengthening the national agenda in the sphere of women's rights.

A significant advance has been the creation of the Women's Forum, a pluralistic body that follows up on the implementation of policies and programmes in favour of women that are linked to the Peace Agreements. In the same spirit, the Agency for the Defence of the Indigenous Woman was created. It is part of the Presidential Commission coordinating the policy of the Executive Branch in the area of human rights. The creation of this body is an unprecedented development in Guatemala, inasmuch as it institutionalizes an agency to monitor the observance of the rights of the indigenous woman, who has historically been the object of discrimination and social exclusion.

At the legislative level, the law to further the dignity and the integral promotion of women was enacted. It takes into account the claims of Mayan women and the consistent content of legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Belém do Pará Convention, as well as political instruments, such as the Platform for Action produced by the Fourth World Conference on Women. Additional legislation is envisaged to fulfil government objectives regarding women and development.

The commitment, endeavour and contribution of Guatemalan civil society, and particularly the various ideas put forward by the women's movement, have taken on concrete expression in the proposal for public action entitled National Policy for the Promotion and Development of Guatemalan Women/Plan for Equality of Opportunities. This proposal will be looked into by the Secretariat for Women of the Presidency of the Republic.

In summary, the Government of Guatemala has shown its strong commitment to peace, democracy and development, within a framework of tolerance, respect, equity and social inclusion. This is the context of its concern to promote equitable participation for women in all walks of national life. Before this United Nations forum we reaffirm our commitment to support the consolidation of the aforementioned bodies, and we trust that the international community will continue to cooperate with us in the full implementation of these undertakings.

The President: I call on Mrs. Lourdes María Rodríguez de Flores, Secretary of the Family of El Salvador.

Mrs. Rodríguez de Flores (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people and the Government of El Salvador, I would like to present a fraternal and heartfelt greeting to you, Mr. President, and to all the representatives present.

When the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, my country, El Salvador, was just emerging from a bloody 12-year war that

caused tremendous social deterioration, ruined the national economy and irreversibly divided the population.

The 1992 Acuerdos de Paz posed the challenge of building a new society with better opportunities for all Salvadorans. In the face of distinct hostility, various groups put their energy into changing the structure of our social relationships, creating understanding that was more cooperative and less conflictual. Among them were groups of women who led the way to urgent change with a view to improving coexistence and enhancing quality of life; they gradually gained a higher level of participation for women as agents of change and active generators of social capital.

At the beginning of our process of consolidating peace and democracy, women and children were, socially, the most disadvantaged groups. The level of education among rural women was below third-grade level, and the illiteracy rate was greater than 23 per cent. El Salvador led, and continues to lead, the list of Latin American countries with high numbers of teenaged mothers, which poses a threat to the future because of the irresponsibility of fathers and because of disinformation.

Because of such significant facts, and because of a desire to overcome them and the relevance of the principles of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, El Salvador has guaranteed that all those guidelines would be followed in a permanent and sustained manner.

Our first great achievement was to institutionalize efforts towards equal opportunity and rights for women with the 1996 creation of the Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development in the context of a national approach to achieving permanent and sustained implementation of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference. The Institute is the national body that guides policy on women and coordinates activities by public and private organizations in keeping with that policy. The Institute coordinates the efforts and experiences of many non-governmental women's organizations which for years have been working in many spheres for women and children. Hence, it has strengthened the areas for participation and joint efforts by the Government and civil society.

In 1996, after an intensive process of broad civil participation, we formulated our national women's policy and its plan of action. When I return home it is expected that the Council of Ministers will adopt the policy's operating plan for 2000 to 2004, in the context of the government programme known as the New Alliance.

I wish now to mention a small number of other achievements that constitute real innovations and that strengthen the holistic development of women. The first is the ratification of the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, which is enabling us to open the way to updating our national legal framework and to carry out awareness and training campaigns.

The second is the formulation and implementation, since 1995, of a programme to improve family relations; coordinated by an inter-institutional committee, this includes a system of services for victims of domestic violence.

Third is the 1996 adoption of a law against domestic violence, which includes mechanisms to prevent, punish and eradicate violence in family relationships.

The fourth is the 1998 creation of a new penal code that protects the constitutional rights of individuals, and covering crimes of abortion, prostitution, rape, sexual aggression, sexual harassment, non-fulfilment of responsibility for economic assistance, and domestic violence.

The fifth achievement is the revision of article 1 of our constitution to recognize that a person is a human being from the moment of conception.

Women's activities to constantly improve quality of life have been reflected, *inter alia*, in two basic achievements in the areas of health and of education. In the health sphere, we have formulated and promulgated standards for care of adolescents and for victims of domestic violence, family planning and reproductive health. It has also been very important to mainstream gender into the training of all health-care professionals.

There has been thorough reform in education, which began in 1989; this has incorporated gender perspectives into the national curriculum and has ensured the publication of educational materials free of sexual stereotypes. The reform process has stressed women's access to formal and informal education to ease their entry into non-traditional jobs and to

eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in school.

Let me speak briefly of some of the challenges that will shape our activities in the near future. We shall be formulating a national plan to monitor and prevent gender-based violence which, through integration at the national, sectoral and municipal levels, will create an effective system for monitoring, awareness and prevention.

We shall improve methods for raising awareness about domestic violence in line with legal norms for the benefit of women.

We shall continue moving forward with the review of laws from a gender perspective, with the assistance of a national legal commission: even though many forms of legal discrimination have been eliminated, women in El Salvador still face discrimination in the way the law is applied.

We shall continue to promote activities that help women gain access to decision-making circles, in both business and the political sphere, because we do not consider that the progress that has been made in some areas is sufficient.

Changes for women are at the heart of modern-day change. As a public servant, but above all as a Salvadoran and Latin American woman, I affirm my uncompromising determination to continue, within our capabilities and in full consonance with reality, to contribute to the achievement of this task to which we are all committed.

Yet it is not my own personal commitment or that of any individual in this Hall that will bring about the successful completion of the task we are discussing at this session. Rather, it will be the organized confluence of all the determination and conviction that can be expected of women worldwide, whose joint efforts will determine the future of our societies, that can make such great dreams and hopes come true.

The present we create is the future we shall have.

The President: I call next on Her Excellency Ms. Khunying Supatra Masdit, Minister, Office of the Prime Minister of Thailand.

Ms. Masdit (Thailand): May I, at the outset, congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at this special session. My congratulations also go to the other elected members of the Bureau. On behalf of the Thai delegation, I also wish to profoundly thank all concerned for their dedication to the preparations leading to this milestone Assembly. At this special session, I am delighted to see that a great number of colleagues from non-governmental organization sectors are part of their Governments' delegations. This forged partnership between Governments and non-governmental organizations, at this mid-decade review of the Beijing Platform for Action, will lay a solid base for member countries to further renew their commitments made in Beijing and to reaffirm accelerated implementation of the Platform for Action.

Thailand has made substantial progress in its implementation of the Beijing commitments since 1995. We have been giving mindful attention to all areas of concern as addressed in the Platform for Action, setting priorities on the basis of the urgency of problems and of people's necessities. Those areas of concern have been tailored to advance the three interconnected goals of the Beijing Conference: equality, development and peace. Thailand has done much in recent years to enhance women's participation in public affairs, especially at the decision- and policy-making levels. Untiring efforts have been made to increase the proportion of women in politics as candidates and advocates, as well as voters. Our aspiration is to prove to society how women's participation can help transform politics and ensure good governance. Women will make a difference in society through their valuable contribution and partnership with men. Thailand strongly encourages women to rise to the challenge of political reform and ameliorating governance. As the year 2000 happens to be the year of elections at all levels in our country, women's political empowerment lies at the heart of our duties.

At the same time, the involvement and participation of women in economic development has been given no less attention. In Thailand's case, we have seen women's most valuable participation in small and medium enterprises. They have become major contributors to this sector of the economy. Thus, we pledge to continue to carry on our earnest support of women in the economic arena.

I must say that the key word to describe Thailand's endeavours in this decade would be "empowerment" The empowerment of women in all spheres of life is, in fact, one of the main goals of our

social policy. In order to reach this goal, we have emphasized not only the women themselves but also their community. Empowerment of the community focuses on strengthening community capabilities to develop self-reliance. The main thrust of the efforts is promoting participation and allowing members of communities to play shared and active roles in planning and implementing, and in solving their own problems. Women, who normally constitute more than half of the community, will be mobilized to foster sustainable development and peace in society through their own voices and deeds.

I am, in fact, very proud to further inform the Assembly that the review of our community empowerment programme in the past two years has shown significant progress. It is gratifying to note that women's groups have displayed such remarkable competence in working for their own interests, which also benefits their communities as a whole. The success of those women is perhaps the most powerful demonstration of how capable women are. These examples have convinced my Government that we must strive to encourage women in their roles as main actors and leaders of community empowerment.

As we continue to promote the advancement of women at the dawn of the new millennium, Thailand is aware that we must be persistent in performing our arduous task of solving the various problems facing our women. Thailand has devoted tremendous time and diligence to resolving certain social issues, such as violence against women, trafficking in women and problems relating to the girl child and to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The issue of combating violence against women ranks high in the country's social policy priorities. The Thai Government has declared November of every year as the month for campaigning against violence against women. With the cooperation of various governmental and non-governmental agencies, as well as of civil society, we are working hard to raise public awareness of this problem. The Thai Government conducts activities all year round to combat violence. We have been putting much emphasis on the elimination of this form of violence, as we wholeheartedly believe that such violence is a cruel form of violation of human rights as well as of women's rights.

Thailand has come a long way in terms of our commitment to the promotion of women's rights and their advancement. Through time, we have learned that one great and urgent task still to be tackled in society is to mainstream gender perspectives into policies and programmes in all sectors. The national mechanism and the national focal point for gender equality have been set up, with responsibility for providing technical support on mainstreaming to concerned agencies. Capacity-building workshops for gender awareness and gender sensitivity training programmes have been organized regularly. The aim is to assist and familiarize planners and programme executives with gender tools, such as gender analysis, gender statistics and gender indicators. This is to enable agencies to identify the differential impact of all policies on women and men so that appropriate measures can be devised to achieve gender equality.

A core curriculum will also be developed to institutionalize gender mainstreaming into the routine work of those departments and agencies. With such integrated measures, it is anticipated that gender issues will be moved to the top of the national agenda and be recognized by all sectors of society.

In conclusion, Thailand wishes to express its full support for the endorsement of the Political Declaration at this forum. We are certain that the Declaration will serve as an important instrument to ensure further monitoring of the progress made after Beijing. We also reiterate our determination to continue our implementation of the Platform, consistent with further action and initiatives to be agreed upon at this juncture. In so doing, we underscore the fact that all efforts cannot be undertaken by any party alone. Collaborations between governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations and civil society, as well as regional and international cooperation, are integral to our accomplishments. Such coordinated efforts will indeed serve as the basis for our common cause towards gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Marie Josée Jacobs, Minister for the Advancement of Women of Luxembourg.

Mrs. Jacobs (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to congratulate you in guiding our efforts to work for agreement. We offer you our very best wishes.

First of all, I would like to say that Luxembourg fully supports the statement made by the representative

of Portugal, speaking on behalf of the European Union, of which we are a member.

In Luxembourg, the Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women have, starting back in 1995, provided guidelines for us for policies to enhance the status of women and gender equality. We attach very great importance to the Convention. Luxembourg was one of the first to sign the additional Protocol, and we are preparing to ratify it.

The Beijing concept was development and peace. Right now, Luxembourg contributes 0.7 per cent of its gross national product to official development assistance. This percentage will be increased to 1 per cent in 2004. Our country regularly contributes to the efforts of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The 2000 Plan of Action and the plan to implement the Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration involve all ministries and civil society. This is our strategy. We are implementing it by creating a legislative framework and by proposing accompanying measures.

In 1997 our Parliament adopted a law making a criminal offence of revisionism and other actions based on illegal discrimination. This law penalizes, *inter alia*, certain types of discriminatory behaviour based on gender or sexual orientation. It states that any national association that has legal personality may, upon agreement from the Ministry of Justice, exercise rights enjoyed by the parties during a civil action. This law is an important step forward, because it will be of great assistance in combating outmoded thinking that is now deemed unacceptable.

A second legislative measure was to designate a male or female delegate responsible for overseeing equality in the private sector. The law on the implementation of the national plan promoting employment provides for the elaboration of a plan for equal employment as obligatory in negotiating collective agreements. Before the implementation of these draft positive actions, to which this law has now given a legal basis, they will be submitted for the views of the gender equality delegates. This framework law opens up access to apprenticeship to persons over 18 years in age and allows women who have devoted years to the education of their children to resume professional training. Parental leave of six months has been introduced for the father and the mother, is non-transferable, with a guarantee of re-employment and a one-time benefit paid by the State.

I am particularly happy to announce the adoption by the Parliament of a law overseeing protection against sexual harassment in the workplace. This law deals with sexual harassment not only by a colleague but also by a client or a supplier. The burden of proof is shared between the victim and the perpetrator. All these measures seek to reduce segregation between men and women in the labour market, and in particular to increase jobs for women. Specific professional training measures have been adopted to train women in new technologies.

Combating social exclusion and violence, neither of which spare women in a country with a high standard of living, commands my full attention. A multidisciplinary working group of male and female representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations has been set up on the initiative of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women. It seeks to coordinate the work of various professional bodies to help the victims of violence. A shelter for young girls was opened, as was a clinic for prostitutes.

In 1999, our Parliament adopted a law to strengthen steps against the trade in human beings and against the sexual exploitation of children, as well as against sex tourism.

In 2000, the women in my country barely account for 20 per cent of those taking political decisions. I do think that the interests of half the population can only be taken into account if this figure represents a rate close to or equal to women's representation in the population.

Luxembourg agreed to the statement entitled "Women, Power and Development", adopted by the Francophonie Conference of Women that took place on 4 and 5 February 2000 in Luxembourg. With the aim of guaranteeing shared, full and active citizenship to women in the decision-making areas, in education and training, in health and the economy, and in peacekeeping, the 55 countries of the Francophonie organization adopted a twofold approach: change and evolution in the roles and responsibilities of women and men leading to a new partnership which will, I

hope, be gender-equal; and systematically mainstreaming all gender policies.

Looking to the future, I would refer to the following priorities: first, implementing our national Plan of Action for employment, not yet completed, with all of its measures to benefit women. We will strengthen our accompanying strategy first and foremost by organizing equal groupings for unions and for management. At the next redrafting of the general status of the employee, our Government will seek to establish an equal structure in our civil service. As yet, the State has not managed to be a pace-setter in this area, as I had announced in Beijing, and I regret this fact.

Secondly, the evolution of women's participation in decision-making will be given my special attention. I am in favour of establishing binding measures for women, particularly when nominating people to electoral slates, even if the coalition agreement between the parties in the Government does not provide for a measure of this kind.

Thirdly, regarding action to combat violence against women, we are preparing a law making it possible to evict any perpetrator of violence from the conjugal home.

Finally, we will be giving heightened attention to changing roles traditionally attributed to women and men. The question of gender equality is a matter that concerns women and men equally.

Luxembourg has developed a pedagogical method that can be applied to teaching and training that takes into account the different type of socialization received by women and men and enables them to develop all of their potential individually. We will see to it that gender teaching is mainstreamed into the curricula of the teaching staff and the vocational guidance staff, as well as that of social workers and law enforcement officers.

It is very important for me that this question of the role of women and men be discussed at this special session. With the participation of men in advancing gender equality, we will be strengthening development in our societies and peace throughout the world.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. João Bernardo de Miranda, Minister for External Relations of Angola.

Mr. de Miranda (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text furnished by the delegation*): It is an honour and a source of personal satisfaction for me to address this special session dedicated to women.

I should like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on behalf of my Government and on my own behalf, for the wise and able manner in which you have led the efforts of the General Assembly. Angola concurs with the statements made by African representatives who spoke earlier, addressing concerns and achievements in our region related to the problems that mostly afflict women.

In the countries of our region, women play a fundamental social role in the production of goods and services and in the education of new generations. At the same time, women are also the most affected by the distortions in the distribution of national wealth. Despite the fact that we recognize the important role played by women in society, they continue to be under-represented in the centres of political decision-making. These areas are still controlled by men who generally have more time for speech-making than for looking after the children.

In our countries, while it is true that we do not abide fully by the principle that all women and men are equal before the law, it is no less true that our Governments do not completely disregard the need to assign women a very important role in the decision-making processes in our societies. Some of our countries are showing their commitment to the building of democracies with deeds, rather than merely by invoking the freedoms and rights of women. In the Republic of Angola, for instance, 16 per cent of the deputies to Parliament are women, while in government they represent 13 per cent of the administration. Women are represented in the army. They are chief executive officers of companies, hospitals and schools. This is a small step forward, but the Government is committed, in an environment of peace and social stability, to doing more in order to achieve a better representation of women in economic, political and social fields.

This special session should devote particular attention to the situation of women in Africa. On that continent, the proliferation of armed conflicts, natural disasters and infectious diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, have accelerated the decay of the social and human fabric and compromised the economic

development of a majority of its countries. Despite its potential wealth, our continent continues to show the lowest rates of human development in the world. Public investment in the social area is insufficient. In the implementation of social development programmes, Governments are struggling with political instability, the burden of external debt and the weakness of their respective economies.

The developed countries and the international financial institutions have the moral and political obligation to assist Africa in facing and overcoming these challenges. The spate of brutal and incomprehensible conflicts ravaging Africa represents a serious obstacle to the implementation of either the Beijing Platform for Action or any other measure and strategy that may be adopted in support of women. Women are the main victims of these calamities, representing the majority of internally displaced people and refugees forced to live off international charity.

Angola, for example, has high maternal mortality rates due to deficient sanitary conditions arising from the destruction of the greater part of the infrastructure by war and the lack of human and material resources. The war has also given rise to the rapid crowding of urban areas and the weakening of the family unit — factors that are the root cause of an increase in poverty and prostitution.

My Government is seriously concerned about this situation and, through the Ministry of Family and Women's Affairs, is seeking immediate solutions in partnership with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. The programme to resettle the displaced and refugees and to reintroduce them to productive activities and the microcredit programme designed to alleviate poverty among women represent some of the measures taken by the Government. These efforts have already begun to produce positive results by contributing to the development of small businesses and the creation of jobs.

The United Nations and each of the States represented here can do something to put an end to the war that has spread to various countries in our continent. We believe that, if there is political will, it will be possible to completely isolate the warmongers, cut off their supply sources and prosecute them judicially. In Angola, the Government is determined and deeply engaged in the search for a lasting solution to the internal conflict, which is visiting tragic consequences upon the population, and upon women in particular.

It is important to recognize that discrimination against women is a result, on the one hand, of historical and cultural factors and, on the other, of ineffectual policies and programmes at the national, regional and global levels to better guarantee women's rights. This special session of the General Assembly offers us a great opportunity to evaluate these policies and to seek solutions that correspond to the objectives of the Beijing Platform. We are aware that, since the last women's world summit, some achievements have been registered in the recognition and practical reaffirmation of women's rights. However, the current situation of women in the world indicates that much more remains to be done.

How can we speak of promoting women's rights when more than half of the world's female population is affected by poverty and misery? Poverty has become most acute in developing countries as a result of structural adjustment policies and some development strategies that marginalize women from the most dynamic productive sectors. How can we aspire to more active participation by women in the exercise of political power and in public life in general when they continue to be the sector of the population most afflicted by illiteracy, low levels of schooling and, consequently, unemployment?

The urgent reversal of this trend is a fundamental prerequisite to guaranteeing women's participation in socio-economic life and in the exercise of their civil and political rights. To this end, it is necessary that the programmes and strategies designed to promote and defend women's rights be more concrete and precise and enjoy the necessary financial support of the international community within the framework of public assistance for development. In this context, my Government supports the principle that at least 0.7 per cent of the gross domestic product of developed countries should be channelled to public assistance for development.

The Political Declaration to be adopted at the end of this session should reflect this commitment, in conjunction with the engagement by all Members of the United Nations to support the Beijing Platform and the Nairobi Strategies.

Finally, I would like to call attention to the work done by the Preparatory Committee for this special

session, and particularly to that of its Chairperson, Ms. Christine Kapalata. We are convinced that thanks to this work, the objectives of this great event will be achieved.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Paik Kyung-nam, Chairperson of the Presidential Commission on Women's Affairs.

Ms. Paik (Republic of Korea): I am deeply honoured to be with leaders from around the world today to reaffirm the commitment articulated in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to forge further initiatives for the enhancement of the status of women in the twenty-first century.

Since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, most countries now include a gender approach in nearly all sectors. There have also been profound changes in gender stereotypes and in negative attitudes towards women and girls in many countries.

Despite the substantial progress of the last five years, however, many persistent obstacles to gender equality remain. My delegation believes that this special session should be an occasion to demonstrate our determination to overcome those difficulties. We hope that a concrete and action-oriented outcome document will be adopted at this session.

Since the Beijing Conference, globalization has had a tremendous influence on the status and the rights of women. The dynamic effect and extent of globalization have contributed to the advancement of women and promoted gender equality.

In other contexts, however, the uneven distribution of globalization's benefits has driven an even deeper wedge between rich and poor. For its part, the Government of the Republic of Korea has taken advantage of this crisis to strengthen policies for women. Embracing the spirit of Beijing, it has initiated free vocational training for women, provided livelihood assistance for unemployed female heads of household and created new jobs for women. In order to protect women workers, it established a special channel to report cases of dismissal based on gender discrimination. My country has staged an impressive economic comeback, while locking in important reforms along the way.

My Government also initiated the "Internet Education for One Million Housewives" programme, as well as the five-year plan for "Women's Human Resource Development for an Information-Intensive Society". Government support has likewise been provided through the Act on Assistance to Women Entrepreneurs, which has resulted in a rapid increase in the number of women who have started enterprises in the information and communication technologies sector.

Armed conflicts have also hampered progress in the area of the protection of women's rights. My delegation believes that we cannot adequately protect women's rights in the absence of peace. We hope that this special session will generate momentum for the greater participation of women during the entire peace process, from the pre-conflict stage to post-conflict reconciliation.

As the Assembly is aware, from 12 to 14 June 2000 in Pyongyang, a North-South summit meeting will be held for the first time since the division of the Korean Peninsula half a century ago. We believe that this meeting will constitute a historic turning point towards reconciliation and cooperation between the two Koreas. Women play a critical and active role in every step towards peace, and we, the Korean women, will do all we can to play a constructive part in this process.

My Government has also placed special emphasis on eliminating domestic violence against women. A Prevention of Domestic Violence Protection Act and a special Act on the Punishment of Domestic Violence have been enacted. By far, however, the most significant achievement of the Government's efforts is the heightened social awareness that domestic violence is no longer just a domestic problem, but a problem that must be addressed by society as a whole.

Strong political will is a prerequisite for the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. For this will to translate into meaningful action, however, women must achieve empowerment in all sectors.

In this respect, we are quite pleased that many women were elected to our National Assembly in last April's general election. Civil groups and non-governmental organizations focusing on women's issues played a visible role in gender mainstreaming during that election. In addition, the Korean Government has striven to promote policies for the empowerment of women. The establishment of the Ministry of Women this year will greatly expand their

participation in the decision-making process in all sectors.

To facilitate the common goals of women all over the world, we face an uphill struggle in the years to come. Let us take the next step by fully implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. For its part, the Republic of Korea will make every effort to accelerate this important process. Let us make a new century for our women.

The President: I wish to commend the representative of the Republic of Korea. She has set the record for perfect time management.

I call on Ms. Andrea Willi, Minister for Family Affairs and Equality between Men and Women of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Willi (Liechtenstein): Liechtenstein's membership in the United Nations and our involvement in the Organization's work on issues of equality between men and women have in the past played a catalytic role for the advancement of women's rights in Liechtenstein. This trend has continued very strongly since the Fourth World Conference. It is a great pleasure for me to take this opportunity to present to this important gathering a brief outline of these efforts over the past five years.

In the beginning of 1997 the Liechtenstein Government submitted a report to Parliament, in which it concluded that the necessary legislation for full equality between men and women was in place. As in other countries, however, it was also noted that there was a continuing gap between *de jure* and de facto equality. In order to promote and accelerate equality between men and women, the Government adopted a set of measures aimed at promoting and accelerating full equality in practice. These measures were designed in the light of the contents of the Beijing Platform for Action and thus for implementation of the Platform at the national level in Liechtenstein.

While Liechtenstein subscribes to the principle of the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at both the national and international levels, it was necessary to identify certain priority areas in which action was particularly needed, such as women in the workplace. Government measures included the adoption of the Equality Act in 1998, which ensures the full equality of women and men in the workplace, and measures to combat violence against women and the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, including a campaign against violence in 1997 and proposed legislation on the right to protection from domestic violence.

A set of measures was adopted to enable women to pursue family and professional lives in parallel, and several campaigns were conducted to raise awareness among the population of issues related to matters of equality. In the area of international cooperation and development, we have placed particular emphasis on projects aimed at assisting women who live in poverty.

We believe that education and awareness-raising are clearly of the highest importance for the achievement of the goal of full de facto equality. Governments can and must take a leading role in designing the relevant policies, but full equality on a daily basis can ultimately be achieved only through the active involvement of women and men themselves. It is thus very fortunate that the work on the advancement of women in Liechtenstein has always been characterized by fruitful dialogue and close interaction between the governmental side and civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations.

In 1999, the first women's congress in Liechtenstein gathered women from all over the country and resulted in the adoption of a catalogue of proposed further measures for the advancement of women. The Equal Opportunity Award 2000 provided an incentive for the active promotion of equality issues by companies, organizations and individuals.

National implementation of the achievements of Beijing remains our priority goal, and all our efforts in this respect are complementary to the required action on the international level. The Beijing Conference was of significant importance for our domestic efforts in this area, and we have continued our efforts in the framework of international organizations, in particular the United Nations.

Like others, we are disappointed that two important goals in the area of the advancement of women have not been achieved: the fifty-fifty representation of women and men in the United Nations Secretariat, and the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). This, however, must not lead to frustration, but rather to stepping up our efforts to achieve these two very important goals as soon as possible. On the positive

side, we have noted with particular satisfaction the adoption of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW last October. This Protocol can prove to be of highest importance for the advancement of women's rights, and we are making every effort to follow up on our signature with early ratification of the Protocol.

Other developments in the area of international law which were of significance to the advancement of women's rights were the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court and the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is of utmost importance that, five years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, we all reaffirm the results of Beijing and commit ourselves to enhancing our efforts for their full implementation. Beijing was a milestone on the road to full equality of women and men. Five years later, much has been achieved; a lot remains to be done.

The President: I now call on Mrs. Dalia Itzik, Minister of the Environment of the State of Israel.

Mrs. Itzik (Israel): At the outset, let me thank the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Assistant Secretary-General Mrs. Angela King; and the Division for the Advancement of Women in the United Nations for the most comprehensive and important report, presented to us at this special session of the General Assembly.

It is a pleasure and an honour to be here with representatives today. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Dalia Itzik. I am a minister in the Government of Israel and a mother of three. I was born in Jerusalem, and served as Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem in charge of education.

Millions of Christian, Muslim and Jewish believers pray for Jerusalem, the city of King David, Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. I have come here today from Jerusalem to pray for all the women of the world. I have come here today from Jerusalem in the name of mothers from the Middle East and from all over the world. My prayer is that we may put an end to war so that the fruits of our wombs will not be used as live targets for bullets, hand grenades and other deadly weapons.

I have come here today from Jerusalem to pray together with all in this Hall that finally there may be an end to the longest lasting slavery in history, the slavery of women. In many countries around the world, women are still bound as if by chains to fundamentalists of all religions, to chauvinism and to prejudice, all expressions of human ignorance in its darkest forms.

I have come here today from Jerusalem to declare, together with all in this Hall, that we will wage an all-out and uncompromising war on physical violence against women and against the invasion of their bodies by sexual coercion. All humanity must fight against that illness with the same force it has applied, and continues to apply, in its fight against the worst diseases in history: the black plague, cancer and AIDS.

A nation which does not grant full equality to women is only half a nation. A world which does not grant full equality to women is only half a world. Equality is not an issue of women alone. It is a need of all civilization. I believe that women's struggle for equality should be a joint effort, together with men, not instead of men and not against men. Equality means democratic rule. Equality means human progress. Equality means high moral standards.

I know that many delegations, including the Israeli delegation, will tell us of the enlightened and advanced laws existing in their countries regarding the equality of women. The Israeli delegation has in fact brought a report showing the remarkable achievements in Israel in this field. We must not, however, be misled by these declarations. All of us, especially the women here today, know that the problem is not always the lack of proper legislation but rather the lack of a proper social attitude. We know that, despite existing equal opportunity laws, there is still discrimination regarding the employment, advancement, appointment and salary level of women. The equal rights laws do not guarantee that women will be nominated for high positions.

Politicians, women's organizations and women journalists in Israel have set out on a journey for women's rights. That journey is long and hard. In spite of our many achievements, we have covered only the first steps on the long road to equality. However, as a woman, I am optimistic and full of hope. I believe that the twenty-first century will be better for women in Israel. We are on the road to peace with our neighbours. In a future peacetime Israel, the need for women in all walks of life will be greater.

Where past centuries were characterized by the Industrial Revolution, a revolution of might, the

twenty-first century will be characterized by a "brain revolution". Work that requires muscle-power today will be replaced by high-tech industries and knowledge that demand brain-power tomorrow. In the era of the brain revolution, the excuse that men have a physical advantage over women no longer applies.

The woman of the year 2000 in Israel and throughout the world will be more educated, more aware of her power, and more assertive in her demands of the society in which she lives.

On a personal level too, I am optimistic. My mother, Marcel Ballas, was born in Iraq and emigrated to Israel 50 years ago. She was uneducated and raised eight children. I was the sixth. In Iraq, the country from which she came, the concept of equal opportunity did not exist. However, my mother gave us, her sons and her daughters alike, the same attention and the same infinite love. When she used to say "I love you", I knew without a doubt that she was not talking about a computer virus.

When I compare my life with that of my mother, I say, yes, we have come a long way. I hope that when my 15-year-old daughter, Adi, compares her life with mine, she too will say, yes, yes, we have certainly come a long way.

The President: I next give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister of Human Resource Development of India.

Mr. Joshi (India): Gender equality, development and peace will all be key to the progress of nations in the twenty-first century. It is therefore appropriate that these should be the themes of the first special session of the General Assembly to take place in the new millennium.

India was the first country to adopt the Beijing Platform for Action without reservations, and it is committed to its goals. In India, the year 2001 will be Women's Empowerment Year. Five years down the road from Beijing, as we review progress and define our vision for the twenty-first century, we seek inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, who said, long before it was fashionable to do so,

> "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality."

The expression of egocentric individualism is alien to Indian social thought. Through its multiple social units, Indian society strives for harmony, plays down differences and lays emphasis on family values and social responsibilities. We do not accept that one sex is inferior to the other. Both share in equal measure the common humanity on which we base our claims for equal human rights and freedoms.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

No human society is perfect, but in our vision, as embodied in our legislation and policies, if any section of society — women, men, children, caste or class — is denied dignity and respect, these must be restored. It is only the ethos of this internalized and convincing striving for harmony and equality which has enabled our vast society to strengthen democratic norms over five decades at all levels of governance.

We take pride in the fact that we are the world's largest democracy, and that our Constitution not only guarantees equality for women in every sphere of political, economic and social life, but also provides for affirmative action in their favour. In India, we have adopted a two-pronged strategy for the empowerment of women; while mainstreaming gender in all policies and programmes across all sectors, we have concentrated on making women-specific interventions. Literacy rates have increased faster for women than for men. In the crucial area of reproductive health, our Reproductive Child Health Programme adopts a non-prescriptive approach to family planning and encourages greater male participation. In geographical scope, our Integrated Child Development Services Programme is one of the largest outreach programmes in the world, and, with over 1 million village-level workers, it is the largest women's workforce under any one programme, anywhere.

The girl child is a special focus of our social concern. Organizing women's collectives and self-help groups has helped in the economic empowerment of women. Microcredit institutions in rural areas have proved to be particularly successful. The strong partnership established with the women's movement and non-governmental organizations has galvanized social mobilization and action in local communities. The judiciary and media have played important roles. All of this has brought about a perceptible improvement in the position of women in India. We are

fully dedicated to proceeding with determination on the road of women's advancement.

In terms of political empowerment, constitutional amendments have reserved for women one third of the seats in grass-roots democratic institutions at the village and municipal level. Nearly 700,000 women now hold positions as members or chairpersons. To carry this process further, our Government has now introduced another Constitutional Amendment Bill, which seeks to make similar reservations for women in Parliament and in the state legislatures.

Important additions to the interlocking and mutually reinforcing web of institutions and systems we have created to advance the cause of women are the Parliamentary Committee on the Empowerment of Women, set up in 1997, a National Centre for Gender Training and Research and a revitalized Committee on Gender Mainstreaming. We are strengthening our monitoring mechanisms and databases to ensure that the benefits of budgetary allocations for women in all schemes and programmes reach them.

While we, like others in the larger community of democracies, work at the national level to implement what we all accepted as common goals in the Beijing Platform, the international environment has not been as supportive as we had hoped it would be, and there have been developments that have thwarted national efforts. Globalization has been a mixed blessing for women; in some developing countries, it has brought them new economic opportunities, but many feel that their marginalization has been accentuated by globalization. Governments have fewer resources and sometimes less freedom to promote social development, and in several instances, the unchecked power of corporate capital, even over national Governments, has increased disparities within societies. Women are the sector that has been most vulnerable to the social stresses of globalization.

Stopping all forms of violence against women must be the foremost priority for all of us. The fact that this violence persists and takes on new forms should be a matter of both shame and concern for all civilized societies. But in addition, democratic and pluralistic countries have had to face proxy wars and externally sponsored terrorism; women and children are the first targets and preferred victims. The international community must unite to respond to these challenges.

The feminization of poverty and the marginalization of women need urgent remedial attention. The eradication of poverty was the foremost objective of the Platform for Action. It remains unrealized. Instead, we have the emergence of the "new poor" — a new category of poor, who do not inherit poverty but fall into it because of inadequate income, a lack of access to social services and ecological deterioration. Gender bias is still not uncommon in programmes to remove illiteracy and malnutrition. Maternal mortality rates are unacceptably higher in the developing countries. While Governments in developing countries do their best to improve health services for women and to provide medicine at affordable costs, they need greater support from their development partners in the international community.

Today, in the first year of the new millennium, our focus should be on the realization of full freedom for women. From liberation and emancipation to empowerment, the story of the fight for gender equality has been one of a continuing struggle to demolish stereotypes and negative social attitudes, while empowering women economically. At this special session, we need to commit ourselves even more strongly, not only to the full empowerment of women, but to their full empowerment in full freedom.

We believe that, in its ancient traditions, India offers a conceptual understanding for our task. The concept of complementarity, rather than conflict between the sexes, has inspired our thought through the ages and guides our actions to the present day. This intuition of complementarity is illustrated in Indian sculpture and painting by the figure of Ardhanarishvara, who is half male and half female, divided vertically down the centre. Modern scientific research, which has located in the left and right sides of the brain what are commonly described as male and female characteristics, confirms a truth that our ancients divined intuitively. Science and faith both tell us that all of us carry from birth the potential to develop together and to celebrate the masculine and feminine aspects of the human personality. As no man or woman is an island, so, at the deepest level, no individual is purely male or female. Different situations bring out unsuspected qualities or failings in ourselves.

The embodiments of knowledge, prosperity and power of the one supreme being in India's traditions are a feminine trinity: Saraswati, the presiding deity of learning; Lakshmi, the presiding deity of wealth; and

Durga, who personifies strength and power. It is our vision that women in the twenty-first century should be embodiments of knowledge, prosperity and power.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Nicole Pery, Secretary of State for Women's Rights and Professional Training of France.

Mrs. Pery (France) (*spoke in French*): It is truly a great pleasure for me to speak to the Assembly today. First, I wish to pay tribute to the role played by the United Nations in combating exclusion and discrimination, particularly as they affect women.

On behalf of the French Government, I assure the Assembly of the full commitment of France to the success of the work of this special session of the General Assembly. We hope that its work will help advance the commitments of the international community to equality between men and women, both *de jure* and de facto.

We fully support the statement made by the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union. We are particularly eager to express our support for the declaration adopted in February 2000 in Luxembourg by the Governments of the States members of the International Organization of la Francophonie.

I wish to voice our concern about three areas that shape women's autonomy and integrity. I wish to speak about girls' full access to education, the elimination of violence and the effective guarantee of the right to health.

Education is the prime tool of equality, as well as of individual, collective and sustainable development. Not only must the educational system be accessible to girls at all levels, but schools and classes must really be mixed. However, that is not enough. The actual contents of education and the curricula must be non-sexist. As Secretary of State for the rights of women, I recently signed a convention with the Ministry of Education that is along those lines.

Combating violence against women is the cornerstone in the struggle for equality. It is by naming this violence and condemning it that the reality of it will cease to be denied. Peace and cohesion become fragile when a society silently acquiesces in violence, be it public or private, between a couple, where sexual violence and rape are not denounced or punished.

There is one kind of violence to which I wish to refer emphatically, because it is bred of poverty and exclusion; this is trafficking in women and prostitution. Human beings are not like merchandise that can be bought and sold. This runs counter to the spirit and the letter of the United Nations Convention of 1949, to which we reiterate our commitment. The negotiations going on in Vienna on the Protocol on the trafficking in human persons, additional to the United Nations Convention against Organized Transnational Crime, must preserve this spirit.

Women's right to health is the third pillar of their autonomy. This is impossible without recognizing fundamental rights in the matter of sexuality and procreation. Free contraception and legalized abortion, accompanied by medical follow-up, are also policies of prevention and early warning that are essential in the area of public health. The rights strengthen the effectiveness of the fight against AIDS, which must continue to mobilize the financial solidarity of the international community. France reiterates its commitments here, as well as its proposal to hold a conference under United Nations auspices, of pharmaceutical companies, donor countries and developing countries, to achieve low-cost access to medical drugs for sick people.

Achieving equal access for women and men to decision-making is a way to achieve full equality. Just a few years ago in my country, this idea was an idea that was known and defended only by men and women committed to feminism. A law on political parity was finally just adopted on 3 May by our Parliament, and it will be implemented during the 2001 municipal elections. Implementation of this law will very soon bring about a feminization of elected assemblies, both local and national. We owe this result to the women's movements, as well as to the determination of the Prime Minister and to the agreement given by the President of the Republic. I am convinced that the balanced participation of women in political decision-making will bring about a renewal in our political life. Power-sharing will trigger other changes in the economic, social and cultural life of our country.

Before I conclude, I wish to mention briefly the most recent international instruments for equality; and here I refer to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the approval procedure of which is to lead to completion in the next few days in France.

Gender equality concerns all countries of the world, the whole of humanity. The priorities laid down in Beijing must today not merely be reaffirmed, but also, if possible, be supplemented, so that we can go beyond them to deal with the new challenges that confront us. We know that equality will determine development and peace.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mr. Rimantas Kairelis, Vice-Minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania.

Mr. Kairelis (Lithuania): We come together at this special session not only to reaffirm our commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action but also to pledge to undertake further actions so as to ensure that words become deeds. Although the word "mainstreaming" had at first been only a clumsy structure causing problems for translators and interpreters of quite a few languages, it is now a well-defined concept demanding its use not only in United Nations resolutions but also in governmental programmes. We realize that the human rights of women and girls are an inalienable and integral part of universal human rights. Therefore, we welcome the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, establishing a right-to-petition procedure.

The fact that so many international and national non-governmental organizations are participating at this special session proves that the partnership between Governments and non-governmental organizations is as important as ever. We should recognize the contribution of civil society, which, in many cases, has been an equal partner to the Governments in promoting the human rights of women.

When it comes to naming the concrete results achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Government of Lithuania is glad to report on progress made and to single out the main achievements. During the five-year period since the Fourth World Conference on Women, which represented a new watershed in the movement for securing equality, development and peace for all women in the world, a legal basis has been created, and a strong institutional mechanism has been established for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Lithuania. The Lithuanian Parliament passed the Law on Equal Opportunities, the first such law in Central and Eastern Europe; it subsequently established a mechanism supervising its implementation — the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman and the Office of Equal Opportunities.

Governmental policies, important preventive programmes and projects tackling poverty and unemployment issues, addressing the situation of families and vulnerable groups, including single mothers with children, as well as women in the rural areas, have been developed. As one of the consequences, the unemployment rate of women in Lithuania became rather low compared to that of men. However, such areas as equal pay for work of equal value, women's involvement in public initiatives, participation in governmental structures, leadership in professional careers and businesses and family relations based on the principle of equality and partnership are the main areas of concern for the Government and society, as a major condition and indicator for mature communities in the valuable development of humanity. We will be glad to report on progress in the future.

To implement a constructive policy, Governments have to engage in real partnership and alliances with non-governmental organizations. The Baltic conference "Beijing +5: challenges and perspectives" has proved that statements calling for collaboration and dialogue between decision-making spheres and movements within civil society are no longer just theoretical frameworks. For three days, the House of the Lithuanian Government looked as the United Nations building does today. Constructive debates among the non-governmental organizations and governmental representatives took place, setting benchmarks, indicators, deadlines and monitoring processes.

Reaffirming our strong commitment to the future implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania is starting to draw up the second national action plan, which will encompass the new guidelines established at this special session. Preparations for the Reykjavik follow-up conference, which will take place in Lithuania in June 2001, are already under way. The conference will formulate further actions and strategies so as to accelerate full implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. To achieve this purpose, follow-up projects, with the cooperation of Governments, non-governmental

organizations and private enterprises, are expected to be initiated at the conference.

In conclusion, since the Beijing Conference Lithuania has made progress involving more women in decision-making processes and promoting gender mainstreaming. However, many issues remain to be addressed in the future so as to create real possibilities for women to enjoy fully the benefits of knowledge, labour and economic independence. I shall conclude by proposing: Let us make the world in the second millennium a real motherland for all peoples, regardless of their race, gender, cultural or religious beliefs.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Norica Nicolai, Secretary of State and Minister of Labour of Romania.

Mrs. Nicolai (Romania): It is a great honour for me to take the floor today as the representative of my country to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled, in such a challenging way for us all, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement delivered this morning by the representative of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

Five years ago, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a comprehensive, action-oriented global strategy for the realization of the human rights of women as an integral part of universal human rights, for the equal participation of women in all fields of social life and for the elimination of discrimination based on gender. This international agenda for women has had a great impact on the policies of Governments, international organizations and civil society all over the world, in terms of thinking and putting into practice new strategies and solutions for the full achievement of gender equality and the advancement of women. A new awareness has arisen that sustainable development cannot be achieved without democracy, the promotion and protection of all human rights, gender balance and the participation of women, as equal partners, in all spheres of life.

In many countries of the world, the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was understood as an integral part of the overall democratization process, which created new opportunities for women's equal participation and for their enjoyment of their human rights.

However, many of the ambitious goals set five years ago in Beijing have yet to be achieved. We are gathering for the next few days in New York to reaffirm the full validity of the Beijing Platform, to give new impetus to relevant national and international efforts and to adopt, through the outcome document of the special session, further measures for the implementation of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action.

The Fourth World Conference on Women has made an essential contribution to the development of Romanian policies on the promotion of the human rights of women and the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities for men and women. Specific institutional and legislative steps have been made following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A national machinery aimed at promoting equal opportunities for men and women was established in October 1995 in the framework of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and is meant to address the main challenges pertaining to the situation of women in Romania: ensuring de facto respect for the principle of non-discriminatory access of women to the labour market; improving their working conditions; improving the legal framework relevant to the enjoyment of women's human rights; and monitoring the implementation of this legislation.

The national institutional framework was gradually developed to involve a wide range of responsible actors: the Subcommittee for Equal Opportunities of the Parliament of Romania, with the participation of parliamentarians from all the political parties represented in Parliament; the Department for the Protection of Children, Women and Family of the institution of the Romanian Ombudsman; and the Commission on Equal Opportunities of the Economic and Social Council, which brings the issues of gender equality into the agenda of the tripartite consultations among the social dialogue partners.

Improved coordination and coherence between all those public authorities responsible for women's issues are still needed for the successful implementation of policies and measures in the field of equal opportunities. In this respect, a recent governmental decision established an Inter-ministerial Consultative

Commission on Equal Opportunities, which is expected substantively to contribute to mainstreaming a gender perspective into all sectoral policies and programmes.

Among recent legislative measures aimed at promoting equal opportunities and an equal sharing of responsibilities within the family, as well as supporting the conciliation of family with professional life, I would like to mention the draft law on equal opportunities and the law on paternal leave.

Let me now turn briefly to an area of concern to all of us — the phenomenon of domestic violence, which, due to its reduced visibility, is still very difficult to prevent, alleviate and control. Steps have been made in this direction, especially through the establishment, in close partnership with non-governmental organizations, of a pilot centre for assistance to victims of family violence. Amendments have also been proposed to the Criminal Code. Increased cooperation at the national and international levels is also required in order to prevent and combat such phenomena as forced prostitution and the trafficking of women and girls.

We are highly encouraged by the increased role of Romanian non-governmental organizations in raising awareness about women's issues, especially in the fields of civil and political rights, economic participation, the development of business opportunities, health and family planning. Their dynamic and innovative spirit gives us confidence in the future of the dialogue and partnership between government and civil society.

An evaluation of progress in my country in the field of the advancement of women shows a particular increase in the contribution of women to such different sectors as health, education, culture, justice and new technologies. At the same time, we must not forget that women are also most affected by economic hardship, reduction in social security, unemployment — be it their own or their family members' — or by different forms of violence. Measures are still needed to stimulate and support the political participation of women in order to ensure a greater presence of women in power and decision-making, with positive influence upon reforms designed to benefit them.

Without an active and direct involvement of women in democratic processes, development and peace, the objectives of the Platform for Action will remain mere aspirations.

We have to join our efforts to build societies based on equality, the full participation of women and men, tolerance and respect for women's human rights.

I take this opportunity to reaffirm Romania's commitment to continue its efforts to overcome obstacles and undertake further actions for the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Last but not least, I wish to recall an idea that was put forward by André Malraux — that if the next millennium is not one of democracy for women and men, it will be a millennium in danger.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Concepción Dancausa Treviño, Secretary-General for Social Affairs of Spain.

Mrs. Dancausa Treviño (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address this special session, whose importance and momentous nature affect not only women but society as a whole.

Five years have elapsed since the Fourth World Conference on Women. I am particularly gratified, on behalf of my Government and in keeping with the guidelines of the European Union, to be able to briefly reflect on the most significant advances that have been achieved in my country since 1995.

Spain has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for men and women, and to this end it has adopted various programmes at the national and local levels and that of the autonomous regions, in keeping with our country's territorial organization.

Plan III, approved by the Spanish Government in March 1997, is presently in force. This plan incorporates the commitments undertaken in Beijing to promote specific programmes aimed at helping women while mainstreaming the principle of equal opportunity in public policy.

Over the past five years, we have strengthened our institutional machinery and increased our budgets and human resources in order to implement the activities and measures provided for in the Platform. These activities are being carried out in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, social actors, the various autonomous regions, local entities and ministerial departments.

Spain to date has made significant progress. In the area of education, 53 per cent of those enrolled in

Spanish universities are women. However, there are still shortcomings. For instance, only 26 per cent of those employed in technical jobs are women. We have a generation of highly educated women, but this is not enough. Achieving autonomy for women requires not only that they be educated but also that they participate in the working world.

In the context of the European Union's employment policies, legislative reform has been directed at resolving problems related to women's unemployment, their vertical and horizontal segregation, the short-term nature of their contracts and the difficulties they face in attempting to juggle family and work. Many measures have been taken. These include the 1997 agreements concerning the employment of social actors and specific measures aimed at promoting increased and better employment.

All of these measures have yielded significant progress in the area of women's contribution to the workforce. Women's participation rate rose from 36 per cent in 1995 to 38 per cent in 1999, increasing their employment rate to 30 per cent from 25 per cent and decreasing the overall unemployment rate to 23 per cent from 30 per cent.

Statistics confirm that clear progress has been made, though difficulties remain. Women must be given improved access to positions of power and decision-making, since despite their increased participation imbalances continue to exist at the qualitative and quantitative levels in all social sectors.

In the political realm, as a result of the recent elections, held last March, women now hold 28 per cent of the seats in Congress, 26 per cent in the Senate, and 29 per cent in the autonomous Parliaments. They also constitute 34 per cent of the Spanish representation in the European Parliament, which is higher than the average of 30 per cent. But this participation must increase. There are still too few high-level women in the business world.

Violence against women has been given particular attention by the Spanish Government. To this end, a plan of action was adopted for 1998-2000 which includes a series of measures and a budget of $70 million.

Today in my country there are specific police and security units charged with assisting women who have been victimized. There are also victim assistance centres in the court system and special centres to help, rehabilitate and follow up on women who have been victims of violence.

Much work has been done in the area of raising the awareness of health care, legal and educational professionals. Legislative reform has also been enacted to improve the protection available to victims, prevent the impunity of perpetrators and accelerate judicial proceedings.

But this is not enough. Spain is prepared in the years to come to support the various activities being carried out at the international level to eradicate domestic violence and to take the necessary measures at the national level. We consider unacceptable the violence that is suffered by the majority women throughout the world.

In the realm of international law, Spain has been supporting the work of the United Nations to promote equality. In March of this year, Spain signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and is currently working on its ratification. In June 1999, Spain submitted reports III and IV to the CEDAW Committee.

Nonetheless, despite all of these efforts, we cannot say that in my country women enjoy the same rights as men. Rural women, older women, migrants and disabled women need special attention and care. Furthermore, the potential of women to contribute to the environment, to the exercise of human rights, to non-violence and to the economy not only must not be forgotten; it must be fully recognized.

The present universal recognition of equal opportunity in a globalized society requires joint action and efforts on the part of developed and developing countries alike so that, overcoming our differences, we can forge a twenty-first century in which society is more equitable and more in harmony with reality.

To this end, the commitment of Governments, institutions, non-governmental organizations and social agencies is required, because we must guarantee equality for all.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Effi Bekou-Balta, Secretary-General for Gender Equality of Greece.

Mrs. Bekou-Balta (Greece): It is a great honour for me to take the floor at this special session of the General Assembly on women in the twenty-first century. I wish to assure the Assembly of my delegation's full support and cooperation for the successful conclusion of this important meeting.

My delegation fully subscribes to the statement made by the Minister for Equality of Portugal on behalf of the European Union.

We are here today to reaffirm our Government's commitment to the goals and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women. Furthermore, we, like so many other delegations, also came here not merely wishing to contribute to the review and appraisal of progress in the implementation of the Platform and identify new challenges and trends; more importantly, we gathered here to agree upon further actions and initiatives and to ensure that further commitments for gender equality, development and peace are made and implemented.

Twenty-five years after the First United Nations World Conference on Women, in Mexico City, there has been considerable progress made towards achieving equality between women and men. During the past century, constant efforts and a lot of hard work led to changes which contributed to the strengthening of democracy, social justice and respect for human rights. Under the influence primarily of the women's movement, Governments were induced or persuaded to adopt specific measures to their benefit.

Five years after the Beijing Conference, although women's rights have eventually been recognized as full human rights, inequalities between women and men still persist and a series of obstacles still prevent the attainment of full equality.

In the new globalized international context, social developments and new technologies create new inequalities which coexist with older ones, in areas such as poverty, unemployment, immigration, violence and exploitation of women and children, inequality in the workplace, salaries, social security, women's participation in decision-making and others.

Turning specifically to my country, Greece, let me highlight areas to which priority has been given and in which outstanding progress has been made. Greece, as a member State of the European Union and a founding Member of the United Nations and other international organizations, supports the full implementation of declarations and international conventions for human rights and the full participation of women in economic, political, social and cultural life at both national and international levels. Since 1982 the Greek Government has adopted a powerful and progressive legal and institutional framework aimed at eradicating all forms of discrimination against women.

In 1983 Greece signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and on 10 December 1999 Greece was one of the first 23 countries to sign the Optional Protocol to that Convention.

Nowadays, protecting women's rights and guaranteeing equal opportunities and the attainment of substantial equality, above and beyond legislative measures, constitute top priorities for the Greek Government, and especially for our Prime Minister, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration.

The 1999 and 2000 National Action Plan for Employment endorsed the proposals of the General Secretariat for Equality aimed at the equal representation of women and men in all employment areas of the public and private sectors.

For the period 2000-2006, the Ministry of Education in Greece has adopted specific measures. Among the various actions undertaken were, *inter alia*, the establishment of all-day kindergartens, day-care stations and programmes within elementary schools.

A number of measures have also been implemented to combat social exclusion, especially for women belonging to religious minorities, refugees, single mothers and inhabitants of remote and rural areas.

In addition, we have established an inter-ministerial committee on violence against women, with the participation of experts and women's organizations, aimed at studying the existing structures for support of the victims and at implementing specific actions for the elimination of the phenomenon.

In each of the 13 regions of the country, equality centres have been in full operation since last year.

In the national parliamentary elections of April 2000, there was an increase in the percentage of

women elected to the Greek Government, from 6 per cent to 10 per cent of the total. The Greek Government is now working on a new legal framework for the equal participation of women and men in decision-making in public administration bodies, as well as in regional and local authorities and councils.

Greece, due to its special geographic and historical position in south-eastern Europe, has undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the principle of equality within the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

In June 2000, Greece, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, will organize an international seminar on trafficking in and sexual exploitation of women and girls from Central and Eastern Europe.

It is absolutely imperative that the principles of Beijing be safeguarded, that our firm commitment to them be renewed and that particular emphasis be placed on implementation of the Platform for Action. At the same time, in view of the formidable challenges which confront humanity in the new millennium, it is also essential to attain these goals in a spirit of constructive cooperation and of mutual respect for and understanding of each one's specific needs and interests.

In this very spirit, it is our fervent wish and hope that the final documents of this milestone event will be the product of general agreement and that they will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President: I call on Mrs. Galina Karelova, Vice-Minister of Labour and Social Development of the Russian Federation.

Mrs. Karelova (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This session taking place in New York is not just another special session of the General Assembly, but a truly global international forum whose decisions will determine to a large extent the social development strategy of the twenty-first century. By discussing the role and place of women in today's world and their contribution to the political and economic life of the world, to the creation of civil society and to the deepening of democratic processes, we are discussing the future of human civilization.

It is impossible to resolve the most burning issues of the day without the participation of women. Their intellectual and spiritual potential are an invaluable resource for enhancing social development. The historic mission of the United Nations is to help women of the world become the artisans of their own fate. We commend the efforts that this Organization is making to eliminate gender discrimination and to enhance the social and economic status of women. Russia has advocated and will continue to advocate enhancing the role and authority of the United Nations in the twenty-first century, as we view it as a unique mechanism for establishing intergovernmental dialogue and for facilitating international relations.

Today our job is to assess the progress made in the five years since the Beijing Conference.

Unfortunately, I am obliged to say that the global processes now under way do not facilitate the achievement of the goals set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, but make it even more difficult. Appalling modern-day realities, such as international terrorism and organized crime, militant separatism and inter-ethnic hostility and illicit trafficking in arms and drugs, directly affect the lives of millions of women in various parts of the world.

Other global problems too place an additional burden upon women. These include the widening economic gap between the world's richest and poorest nations, the deteriorating environment and the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS and other highly dangerous infections. There has been no decline in the number of women and children who fall victim to armed conflict.

There is no doubt that conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes require appropriate and sometimes decisive responses from the international community. But I stress that the notion of so-called humanitarian intervention can in no way be used to flout basic principles of international law, such as the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. Russia will consistently oppose "armed humanitarianism" and will promote the creation of a multi-polar world architecture in which all countries and nations can live without fear of discrimination, coercion or political blackmail.

Women in Central and Eastern Europe and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) have played a most positive role in bringing about market reform and in creating democratic institutions. I am pleased that the special problems of countries with economies in transition are duly reflected in the draft outcome document of the special session.

Russia itself has been experiencing the whole range of problems associated with the transition process. The Russian Government has begun work on a long-term nationwide development strategy for overcoming the effects of the protracted crisis. The focus of the strategy is not on reform per se, but on the people for whom the reform is being carried out.

Recently we have significantly enhanced the effectiveness of our social policy by making it more targeted. There were tangible improvements in 1999: wages in the public sector increased by 50 per cent; scholarships were doubled; pensions were indexed on a permanent basis and now almost equal the minimum standard of living. All these measures directly affect the status of Russian women, who form a majority of the population.

The decisions taken at the Beijing Conference gave Russia a strong impetus to strengthen our institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women and to search for new ways to achieve gender equality. Our gains include the expansion of women's representation in local administrations, an increased number of women participating in legislative elections, increased interaction between State structures and non-governmental women's organizations, and new employment opportunities for women, including in the business sector.

Nevertheless, we cannot hide the fact that there are difficulties in the way of achieving genuine equality. Russian women, like those throughout the world, continue to confront such problems as gender discrimination, poverty, unemployment and inadequate representation in administrative posts.

We have given a detailed and frank description of our achievements and our shortcomings in the Russian Federation's national report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which has been circulated at this session.

Life in Russia is changing very quickly. We now have a newly elected, young and energetic President, a newly elected lower chamber of Parliament and a newly appointed cabinet of ministers. Women are pinning great hopes on these changes. Just a few days ago the State Duma held parliamentary hearings on equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women, and the Government held a third all-Russia conference on the status of women. Discussion at these forums showed that women remain the most active group in Russian society and that they make an enormous contribution to the political and economic life of our country.

This special session will undoubtedly provide considerable input for addressing the global challenges facing us, and will bring together all the world's women. Only by working together can we respond to the challenges of our time. Only with mutual support can we attain the lofty goal of making the twenty-first century a century of gender equality, social partnership and creative labour.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to Mrs. Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, Chairperson of the delegation of Ghana.

Mrs. Rawlings (Ghana): I bring to all participants in this special session and to all supporters of the crusade for the empowerment of women the warmest greetings and best wishes of the President, the Government and the people of Ghana, as well as those of the teeming masses of women who walk miles to fetch drinking water and who are struggling daily to feed, house and educate their children.

It is indeed a privilege for me to be here to give a voice to the voiceless. The majority of underprivileged women in Ghana, whose interests I represent here, may be unaware that this session of the General Assembly is even taking place. But it is their social, economic and political welfare that form the core theme of this session.

At the start of this new millennium, it is indeed appropriate that we should gather here to review and evaluate the Beijing Conference, because few issues are more urgent than the empowerment of women; few measures can have such a far-reaching positive impact than giving women better access to education, basic health care and financial resources.

The ones whose lives should be made better by the decisions we take at this gathering are the poor women in the villages and the slums of Africa and of developing countries everywhere, who walk vast distances to find wood for cooking, who toil for hours in the fields under the hot sun. These are the ones whose empowerment should be the focus of our attention and of our endeavours.

The Beijing Conference was a major landmark in the continuing struggle for women's empowerment. It brought issues of gender equality to the centre of the

global agenda and highlighted 12 critical areas of concern, among others. Since the Beijing Conference, much has been achieved at all levels in moving forward the agenda of gender equality. Today, throughout the international community, there is a new level of awareness of gender issues; there is a degree of intensified mobilization in support of women's empowerment; and there is a renewed momentum to end institutionalized discrimination against women — a momentum which was absent before the Beijing Conference.

Five years on, as we meet here today in this special session, the consensus is not to renegotiate the text of Beijing — that is not what we are about — but to take stock and provide a critical overview of follow-up activities in the implementation of the agreed decisions.

The theme for this session is especially timely in the light of the tragic conflicts and unrest in so many parts of the world, and especially in Africa today. In the Sudan, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, the wars continue to rage, and vast numbers of innocent women and children are subjected to unbearable hardships as a direct consequence of these wars.

Thanks to our collective efforts, it is acknowledged today, more than ever before, that the empowerment of women has ceased to be an academic debate. The world now recognizes that promoting the welfare of women enhances the integrity and dignity of all humanity. In several parts of the world, the understanding has emerged that genuine and determined efforts to make women equal participants in economic and political life are ongoing. But our mission transcends the quest for social justice. Empowering women is an essential precondition for liberating society itself from many of its self-inflicted miseries. Society itself must therefore be encouraged to exercise its collective power to those ends. I think we should be justifiably proud of how far we have come, while remaining always on our guard — we must be on our guard — so that our hard-won gains are not eroded.

Allow me now to tell the Assembly about our own efforts in Ghana in the wake of the Beijing Conference. Whatever progress we have achieved in Ghana on women's issues must be seen in the context of the broader, far-reaching political, social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place. For the first time, the ordinary men and women of Ghana have had their self-confidence restored and have recovered their belief in their capacity to manage their affairs. Through structures at the local and district levels, people are directly involved in making the critical choices that affect their daily lives. It is in this context that various laws have been adopted ensuring that the property rights, economic and social rights and cultural rights of women have been adequately protected.

We are doing our best to grapple with the moral imperatives of the Beijing Platform for Action. Certainly, we cherish our cultural heritage and the centuries-old traditions from which our society derives its identity, and perhaps its resilience. But we also acknowledge that practices that undermine human dignity, retard social progress and bring about unnecessary misery and suffering must not be countenanced by any society that appreciates the worth of its people.

Laws have therefore been passed to criminalize harmful socio-economic and sociocultural practices, such as female genital mutilation and ritual servitude, including the Trokosi system, whereby females are kept in virtual slavery for crimes purported to have been committed by their families. Penalties for rape and defilement have become stiffer. The legal minimum age for marriage has been increased from 14 to 18 years for both boys and girls. To see to it that women have effective and prompt justice, a Women and Juveniles Unit has been set up in the police force to handle cases of abuse of the rights of women and children.

All of these efforts have been complemented by sustained public education on female reproductive health and birth control. In addition, special attention is being given to the enrolment of the girl child in school.

The importance of small-scale industry and cooperatives in improving the income-earning capacity of urban and rural poor women has not been overlooked at all. To address the critical issue of poverty, the Government of Ghana, with the support of the donor community, has developed a national poverty reduction programme that is being implemented by both the public sector and non-governmental organizations. For our women, this programme offers credit facilities and entrepreneurial training. In addition, 30 per cent of the local-government common

fund is used to support the economic activities of women.

Under our health-sector-wide approach, free medical care for pregnant women, children under the age of 5 and people over the age of 70 years is guaranteed. These programmes have had measurable results: from 1993 to 1998, infant mortality decreased from 66 to 56.7 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy for females increased from 58 years in 1993 to 61 years in 1998. The Government of Ghana is also vigorously pursuing the establishment of a health insurance scheme.

The result of our modest efforts is becoming increasingly visible in the number of active female participants in public life and politics, generally. Undeniably, the presence of women in our Parliament and in the Government has greatly enriched Ghanaian politics.

Whichever way we look at it, gender equality, peace and development should define both our individual and our collective roles in the twenty-first century. Our failures and humiliations, as well as our triumphs in the last century, demand nothing less of us.

Despite all of the achievements that I have outlined, Ghana faces new and formidable challenges in pushing forward the agenda for the advancement of women. Structural adjustment, privatization, trade liberalization and globalization have had and continue to have a negative impact on women and children. Our transition to a market economy has affected women's access to employment, health, education and other social services. The recent increase in the price of crude oil and the sharp fall in the price of cocoa and gold — our primary export commodities — have had adverse effects on our fragile economic recovery, resulting in the increasing feminization of poverty, particularly among female-headed households.

The Beijing meeting gave us an important launching pad for reaching greater heights. I have endeavoured to outline some of the measures that have been implemented by Ghana, with the support of United Nations agencies and many other countries, in furtherance of the objectives of the Platform for Action.

It can be seen that our follow-up efforts have been multifaceted, involving action at the international, national and grass-roots levels, as well as the public and private sectors. The cornerstone of our programme essentially remains poverty reduction, credit facilities, coupled with entrepreneurship training for women, access to free medical care for pregnant women, the free compulsory universal basic education programme and a host of other efforts that I will not bore you with today.

Whatever our shortcomings have been over the past five years, it should be understood that the Platform for Action is a global initiative aimed at realizing shared objectives and consolidating the shared values without which our vision for the twenty-first century will elude us. If we are to succeed, then we need each other — rich and poor countries alike — as common citizens of this truly global village.

In conclusion, five years after Beijing, the progress made in empowering Ghanaian women can be seen as a glass half-full or a glass half-empty. However, I would choose to emphasize the half-full aspect and pay tribute to the important role that civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, has played in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is my hope, and the hope of my delegation, that during this special session the international community will recommit itself to the agreements we reached in Beijing by providing adequate resources for the effective implementation of the Platform.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/S-23/PV.3

General Assembly

Twenty-third special session

Official Records

3rd meeting
Tuesday, 6 June 2000, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Lieutenant-General Christon Tembo, Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia.

Lieutenant-General Tembo (Zambia): Allow me to express my Government's appreciation that a nation of our subregional grouping, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), through you, Mr. President, is presiding over this important special session of the General Assembly. We wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on the efficient and able manner in which you are guiding the business of this session.

Zambia has, since the Fourth World Conference on Women, made great strides in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and has made significant progress in accomplishing specific commitments. We began our national implementation process by translating the Beijing Platform for Action into a national plan for the advancement of women. The strategic plan, which covers the period 1996 to 2001, identifies five priority areas: first, the persistent and growing burden of poverty on women and their unequal access to resources and lack of participation in economic structures and policies; secondly, inequality in access to opportunities in education, skills development and training; thirdly, women's unequal access to health and related services; fourthly, inequality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision-making; and fifthly, the rights of the girl child.

In addition, there are six underlying and cross-cutting issues identified as important in addressing the critical areas of concern. The cross-cutting issues are as follows: first, the critical role of the media at all levels; secondly, the need for gender-disaggregated data; thirdly, the establishment of effective institutional mechanisms; fourthly, promoting the human rights of women; fifthly, considering the implications of cultural and traditional Westernization in all areas; and sixthly, the rural, peri-urban and urban trichotomy of the Zambian population.

I am pleased to inform this special session that the Zambian Government and other stakeholders have endeavoured to implement the national plan with considerable results. The details of the measures undertaken, achievements made and obstacles encountered are reflected in a national mid-term review report, which has been widely circulated among United Nations agencies, Member States and others.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The Zambian Cabinet adopted the first national gender policy on the 6 March 2000. This is a landmark document that prescribes policy measures that cut across sectors, institutional structures and issues and aim at enhancing gender responsive development. We are convinced that the policy will accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action.

Given that political will and enthusiasm exist at all levels in Zambia, we consider the implementation of the Platform for Action as an integral part of our national development process. We therefore continue to make every effort to mainstream gender in all our policies and programmes.

In the process of implementing the Platform for Action, we have identified a number of obstacles and challenges which have affected the implementation process. The issues we have identified are certainly not new; they are, in fact, referred to in the Beijing Platform for Action. However, they have far-reaching implications for Government's capacity to implement the Platform for Action.

Key obstacles that have hampered our implementation include, first, household poverty; secondly, huge national debt; and thirdly, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. These three major obstacles, among others, pose a serious threat to the Platform for Action. We require strong and concerted national and international efforts in order to surmount them.

Household poverty is an extremely serious problem in Zambia. Currently, approximately 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, the majority being women. Women and men experience poverty in different ways. The feminization of poverty is less a question of whether more women than men are poor than the severity of poverty, and of the greater hardships women face in lifting themselves and their children out of the poverty trap. The wide range of biases in society and the unequal opportunities in education, employment and access to and control over productive resources, such as land, means that women have fewer opportunities.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on women and children has emerged as a very serious one. A combination of physiological and socio-economic factors makes women more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. Poverty and HIV/AIDS are therefore closely linked. Poverty contributes to the spread of HIV and accentuates its impact. Poverty creates situations of vulnerability to infection, especially among women. The effect of HIV/AIDS on economic capacity is particularly significant. Associated with AIDS-related deaths are huge medical expenses and loss of human capital. Estimates state that without foreign capital inflows into Zambia, costs of medical treatment, attrition and other costs associated with AIDS would result in a fall in gross domestic product of about 9 per cent below normal projected levels. Without an unprecedented infusion of foreign aid, our national income would therefore be reduced significantly.

Zambia is in the category of highly indebted poor countries. In this regard, the debt burden is a major contributor to the persistence of its underdevelopment. Zambia's debt-servicing obligations constitute the single largest item of expenditure in the public budget. It far outstrips expenditure on health, education or any other sector.

Debt servicing has a significant impact on public budgets, and thus has severely shrunk resources available for development and has greatly reduced the prospects for growth. Inequalities are created and increased by debt not only through income, but also in respect of gender.

Evidently, Zambia has a legitimate reason to seek significant debt relief, if not outright debt cancellation. It has religiously continued to implement structural and other reforms. It remains committed to debt servicing, albeit to the detriment of our priorities in the social sectors, particularly in regard to poverty alleviation. Debt servicing assumes availability of resources for development through donor assistance. Debt servicing has in the main, however, deprived the country of resources that would have been channelled towards development activities. The reality of the situation is that the outflow through debt servicing far exceeds inflows through external aid. There is therefore a need for foreign debt-relief initiatives to go beyond the existing framework in order to increase the financial flows of resources to highly indebted developing countries.

There are other challenges that will require strong national and international collaboration and partnership. Violence against women and children, particularly girls, is a menace to human development. Another challenge is the impact of the socio-economic globalization process on our economy. There is a direct relationship between poor performance of the

economies of developing countries and the global economic system, which is presently biased in favour of developed countries. Unless the global economic system promotes growth in least developed countries, important development programmes, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, can realize only minimal results.

We wish to express sincere appreciation to the United Nations for conducting meetings to follow up the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national levels.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming my Government's commitment to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. This is a responsibility we must assume for gender equality.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia for his statement.

I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hasan Gemici, Minister of State of Turkey responsible for women's affairs, family and social services.

Mr. Gemici (Turkey) (*spoke in Turkish; English text furnished by the delegation*): Turkey fully supports the statement of the European Union delivered by the Portuguese Presidency. I shall take this opportunity to express our national views regarding the advancement and empowerment of women in Turkey.

Let me first express our appreciation for the invaluable contribution of the United Nations system, and of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, towards the advancement and empowerment of women. The United Nations has been highly instrumental in the formulation of policies responding to conceptual changes in the field of gender equality. The Fourth World Conference on Women was a breakthrough in the recognition of the concepts of gender and of women's human rights. My delegation believes that the full achievement of the human rights of women and girl children is not only a legal, but also an ethical responsibility. It must be our common objective to further strengthen international cooperation in this regard.

The founding of the Republic of Turkey and the reforms that followed were revolutionary in the cause of women's rights. Women in Turkey embraced their true identity with the Republic and gained suffrage rights before women in many other countries. In 1934 there were as few as 28 countries in the world where women had the right to elect and to be elected. Turkey was one of them. The civil code enacted in 1926 contained significantly advanced provisions in the field of gender equality. Today, building upon that legacy, we relentlessly pursue our goals: to enhance the status of women, to ensure gender equality and to promote the participation of women at all levels of social life. We have made some important achievements in this regard. But we know that the current situation calls for much improvement.

At Beijing, five years ago, Turkey made significant commitments. We committed ourselves to withdraw the reservations we had placed on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We promised to extend compulsory basic education from five to eight years. We announced our intention to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates by at least half by the year 2000 and to eradicate illiteracy among women. It is my great pleasure to state before the Assembly today that we have accomplished most of those commitments.

Compulsory basic education was increased from five to eight years in 1997. With this, the enrolment rate of girl children increased by 67 per cent. Although we have not been able fully to realize our commitments on the reduction of infant and maternal mortality rates and on the eradication of illiteracy among women, considerable improvements have taken place. We have enacted legislation on family protection. Under the new legislation, any family member subject to domestic violence can file for a protection order. As the Turkish Parliament passed this legislation in response to years of active advocacy and lobbying by the women's movement, it also acknowledged domestic violence as a major violation of women's human rights and confirmed the State's responsibility to protect women from such violations occurring in the private sphere.

As a part of this reform process, since the Beijing Conference, a new draft civil code, prepared with a gender perspective and incorporating the contributions of non-governmental women's organizations, is now before the Turkish parliament. In line with the Beijing Platform for Action, a standing committee on gender equality was established at the parliamentary level with a view to ensuring gender mainstreaming in all policies and legislative work.

One of the concrete gains since the Beijing Conference has been the flourishing of dynamic civil

society organizations in the field of women's human rights. As the State minister responsible for women's affairs, I would like to emphasize the substantial role of women's organizations in our work. In this connection I am particularly pleased that my delegation includes women members of Parliament from various political parties, as well as representatives of non-governmental women's organizations.

The advancement and empowerment of women is a dynamic process. That process rests not only on legislative reforms, but also on integrated measures in the fields of education, health and economic policies. Turkey is in the process of harmonizing its legal and administrative structure with the European Union *acquis communautaire*. The elimination of the obstacles hindering that process and ensuring the full enjoyment of rights provided by law is a vital part of the harmonization process.

We are gathered here today as the international community to identify where we stand in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We have undoubtedly been faced with common as well as country-specific problems in the past five years. Our experiences will shed light on our future actions. The draft political declaration and the draft outcome document that we hope will be adopted at the end of this special session will guide us. My country is determined to continue contributing to all international endeavours in the field of women's rights with full dedication.

At the national level, we plan to place further emphasis on the following issues, while being fully aware of the challenges we face. As a matter of priority, we are committed to allocating sufficient resources to gender equality issues. In close collaboration with all political parties and non-governmental women's organizations, we are trying to generate strong political will to that end. Ensuring the full and equal representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making is also one of our priority concerns. We attach great importance to the institution-building process as a basis for achieving all these targets.

While the world community has witnessed dramatic improvements in the advancement of women and in gender equality, challenges still lie ahead. In various parts of the world, women and girl children are still confronted with inequality and injustice. It is our common duty and responsibility to ensure an enabling environment for all women to fully enjoy their rights.

This is a momentous gathering which will provide solid ground for cooperation and collaboration among Governments, civil society, international organizations and all other relevant actors with a view to realizing our ultimate goals of gender equality, development and peace.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Vilma Espín Buillois, member of the Council of State of Cuba and President of the Cuban Women's Federation.

Ms. Espín Buillois (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): During the five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women there have been, in a number of regions and countries, major advances in the implementation of certain aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is true, however, that in many places women claim that this document, which is so vital for their progress, has been languishing in hidden archives.

The growing social activism of the masses of women and the pressure and demands upon Governments by many women's organizations with regard to the process of following up on Beijing have resulted in some progress in the enactment of laws recognizing women's political rights and incorporating the principle of equality in family law; indeed, in criminal law many countries have defined all the diverse forms of violence against women as crimes.

Some Governments have also created mechanisms — ministries, offices or commissions — with the specific objective of promoting progress for women. The most relevant aspect is the growing awareness on the part of women and the public in general of the rapid increase and expansion in existing and emerging social ills and of the lack of solutions to the most pressing problems that were identified and accorded priority in Beijing. The direct relationship between the worsening economic and social situation of women in the past five years and the general situation of a world dominated by the neo-liberal ideology, principles and rules of globalization, with its devastating impact, has become evident.

The world is entering the twenty-first century with 800 million human beings dying of hunger, while the 200 richest people in the world have amassed an

astronomical fortune amounting to $1 trillion. In 1999, the assets of the world's three richest people were greater than the combined gross national product of the 49 least developed countries.

The reality of today's world is deeply painful. More than half of the world's inhabitants are poor or destitute; 1 billion are illiterate; 250 million children work on a regular basis; 130 million people have no access whatsoever to education; and 100 million children live in the street. It has been estimated that over 11 million children under the age of five die every year from malnutrition, poverty or preventable or curable diseases.

The period under consideration is marked by a widening of the economic and technological gap between the countries of the South and the North, enormous differences between rich and poor within countries, the irrational and irreversible destruction of nature and its non-renewable resources, wastefulness and genocidal and economic wars.

In the past five years, women have seen themselves excluded from opportunities to gain access to dignified work, suitable technical and professional training, health care and the safeguards of social security. Privatization, adjustment policies, financial crises and the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund have increased the feminization of poverty and unemployment, job insecurity and the use of women as a cheap source of labour.

These are the most important issues that concern women today throughout the world, and they are often aggravated by the indifference and ineffectiveness of States weakened by the concept of neo-liberalism itself and by a lack of political will, resources and development possibilities. Without public policies in favour of the equitable participation of women in sustainable development, there can be no social progress.

In our country, the Beijing commitments were carried out in an environment, spirit and circumstances that were favourable to the achievement of significant results leading to the greater participation of women in the economic, social and political life of the country, so that gender equality could continue to develop and to advance.

The Republic of Cuba's national action plan for follow-up of the Beijing Conference, set up by the Council of State, is the expression our Government's political will and a recognition of Cuban women's human rights. I am very pleased to inform the Assembly that the programme has been successful and continues to be implemented with a full sense of responsibility and necessity by each and every one of the institutions involved.

Over the past five years, a modest but sustained recovery has been under way in the national economy, one in which women have played an essential role as workers, technicians, scientists, leaders and voluntary contributors to help their communities' development — protagonists of the enormous effort made in an indestructible union of women and men by all of the Cuban people.

The criminal measures being taken to escalate the economic war that the United States of America — the most powerful country in the world — declared on us almost four decades ago, have been unable to crush the will and determination of Cuban women and men. They have not been able to destroy our determination to preserve our social achievements and pursue our path towards development with social justice and equality. They have failed to prevent us from continuing to shape our dreams. In Cuba, truth and justice are realities. We hope that soon, in this country, justice will prevail and that Elián will return free and happy to Cuba, to his home, and the welcoming embrace of his grandparents, with his father, his father's wife and his little brother. We are sincerely grateful for the warm and steadfast support of the North American people in this struggle.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, in the framework of discussions held within the United Nations and other international forums, we often heard experts and representatives from both sides give assurances that all the resources devoted to arms production, technological development and research for war would be devoted to the elimination of hunger and poverty and to the creation of schools, hospitals and medical services to ensure the physical and intellectual development of all the people of the world and to conduct the necessary research to save humankind from dangerous diseases. These statements inspired great hopes among the peoples of the world, among all the inhabitants of the earth and among women, who have steadfastly fought with dignity to make their rights a reality, following the agreements reached at the 1975 meeting in Mexico.

In 1979 the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was immediately signed by Cuba and many other countries. It is shameful that, to date, certain States have not yet ratified it and that others have not even signed it.

It was believed that the past 10 years would be the decade of the advancement of women throughout the world — the decade in which they would be able fully to enjoy their human rights. It was to be the decade of children's rights, of human rights and the globalization of justice, solidarity and peace. It was believed that, at the threshold of a new millennium and a new century, new possibilities would be opened up for progress for all and for the exchange of and full participation in scientific and technological advances for the benefit of humanity.

However, that has not been the case. The final decade of the millennium has been characterized by the rapid rise of poverty, extreme violence, the consequences of the unbounded and insane greed of the huge economic Powers, the merchants of war and State terrorism, which today goes unpunished as the result of the unipolar nature of the world.

Bombing cities, with its huge cost in human life and injury; refusing to allow the sale of food or medicine; and the murder of thousands of children in their shelters with special penetrating missiles developed in research centres, conceived and designed for these brutal deeds: these and other abominable and monstrous actions are the result of that colossal selfishness.

Indiscriminate arms sales in conflict zones have created wars which that taken countless lives and brought about destruction and the displacement of children, women, the elderly and entire populations that emigrate, settling in precarious conditions and creating new problems.

The army of the poor multiplies, not to mention the traffickers, the kidnappers, the sellers of women and children destined for prostitution, slavery or the sale of their organs. How much cruelty, how much ignominy, what degree of degradation and lack of human conscience can be reached? All of these, the consequences of selfishness, of poverty, of violence, must come to an end. We must struggle for development. This entire order of things must be put to an end.

Undoubtedly, the neo-liberal model has failed. But still the inhabitants of this planet suffer and will continue to suffer the serious consequences of its profound and catastrophic crises. But mothers will not let their children starve to death. They will fight like lions to save them. A new economic and social order that would eliminate all types of discrimination and bring progress and welfare for all, the broadest respect for sovereignty, independence and the self-determination of peoples, and the full realization of human rights for all is essential and urgently needed. The aspiration to obtain equality, development and peace remains a fundamental goal for women.

Immersed in these supreme efforts is the women's movement, which is tireless, vibrant, present, growing and active in all continents. It is diverse and pluralistic, it is struggling vigorously and in awareness of the need to move towards another type of globalization, one of solidarity, one that is just and rational and includes all, women and men, in the enjoyment of a better life, a full life of dignity.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ha Thi Khiet, Chairperson of the Committee for the Advancement of Women of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Ha Thi Khiet (Viet Nam) (*spoke in Vietnamese; English text furnished by the delegation*): On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to convey the warmest greetings to you, Mr. President, and the entire distinguished Assembly. We highly appreciate the efforts of the various Governments, United Nations agencies and, especially, the Commission on the Status of Women in the preparations for this first special session of the General Assembly on women. I hope and believe that our session will be a great success.

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam considers that women's emancipation is one of the major objectives of the Vietnamese revolution and that it exerts a direct and long-term impact on national development. In history, Vietnamese women have made glorious contributions, which are acknowledged by the entire nation, to the cause of national construction and defence; and at present, Vietnamese women possess huge potential and constitute an important impetus for the process of renewal. Proceeding from the conviction that the advancement of women brings about benefits for both women and men, family and society, the

Vietnamese Government's policy is to make adequate investment and provide diverse support to improve women's status and enhance their participation in all fields of life.

It can now be affirmed that the Beijing Conference in 1995 has contributed to the proud changes in Viet Nam. For the first time, our Government has approved and directed the implementation of the overall Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, which fully reflects the spirit of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Our National Committee for the Advancement of Women has consolidated its organizational structures and extended its network to 50 ministries, other central Government agencies and all provinces and cities throughout the country. Public awareness on gender equality has been raised in general, creating a momentum for gradually integrating gender into policy-making and implementing processes in all ministries and at all other administrative levels.

As a result, over the past five years since Beijing, Viet Nam has recorded important achievements: the percentage of poor households went down from 30 per cent to 13 per cent in 1999; the literacy rate among women went up from 82 per cent to 88 per cent; the population growth rate was reduced to 1.558 per cent; and, as of last year, the average life expectancy of women was 69.9 years. What is particularly interesting is the fact that the number of women in leadership and elected bodies has increased throughout the power hierarchy. Women are represented from the top leadership of the State to the grass-roots levels of village and commune.

It is also gratifying to note that activities for the advancement of women in Viet Nam have been increasingly rich in content, diverse in form and more and more effective; those activities have involved the whole society. The Viet Nam Women's Union, as a mass organization broadly representing the rights and interests of women of all strata of society, has been playing a leading role in the network operating for the advancement of women. On the basis of these achievements, we wish to share with the Assembly our experience regarding integration of the State's sound policy and the women's dynamic movement and regarding the relationship between the catalytic role of the national machinery and the responsibilities of the authorities at all levels in the joint efforts for gender equality.

We agree with the fundamental positions contained in the two main draft documents of this session, namely the draft political declaration and the draft document on further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Though positive gains have been made in the pursuance of the Beijing Platform's concrete objectives, they still fall short of our expectations. We hold that the relations of partnership should be further enhanced in the international community, including those in the United Nations system — among intergovernmental mechanisms, Governments and non-governmental organizations, and between women and men the world over — to deal with the obstacles and challenges to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform. Appropriate solutions to the negative aspects of the vigorously unfolding globalization process must also be found to ensure that women and men in developing countries can have the opportunity to participate in and to benefit from this process as those in developed countries do.

Gender equality and the advancement of women must become a cross-cutting theme in the endeavour for peace, stability and cooperation for development, which is a trend facing all nations and States of the world. For that reason, we welcome the fact that this special session is to set a time-frame for the initiatives and follow-up actions aimed at effectively implementing the Beijing Platform. The Vietnamese delegation would like to propose that the Fifth World Conference on Women be convened in 2005, in keeping with the established tradition, to review the 20 years of implementation of the Nairobi Strategies and the 10 years of implementation of the Beijing Platform, and to map out a global strategy on gender equality and the advancement of women for the following years of the twenty-first century.

Once again, the Vietnamese Government pledges to do its utmost, in the context of the specific conditions of Viet Nam, to successfully implement the Beijing Platform.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for the Status of Women of Canada.

Mrs. Fry (Canada): I am honoured to be here representing Canada.

In 1995 the United Nations *Human Development Report* called the long walk towards gender equality

the most important movement of the twentieth century. That same year, the Beijing Platform for Action was accepted, and it became the turning point that moved the world beyond the rhetoric to the substantive. As we enter the twenty-first century, it remains the blueprint for empowering women and for achieving universal gender equality.

(*spoke in French*)

With that blueprint in hand, Canada is here today with the world's nations to chart the course for a new century and to build on the tenuous gains women have made in the twentieth century.

(*spoke in English*)

We believe that to allow those hard-won gains to be eroded would be an injustice to the women of the world and would mark a backward step in our shared goals of economic and social development, peace and human security.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada remains resolute in its commitment to the equality of men and women throughout the world. We have confirmed this commitment by action at the national and international levels.

(*spoke in English*)

Within the United Nations and other forums, such as the Commonwealth, la Francophonie, the Organization of American States and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, Canada has shared its data, research, experiences and best practices. We have learned from other countries creative ways of promoting women's rights and of ensuring that these rights are realized, not only *de jure* but de facto.

This year in Canada, we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which was the first formal acknowledgement of women's rights in Canada. As a result, equal rights for women became enshrined within the Canadian Constitution, becoming the cornerstone for legislative and legal advancements. Over the past 30 years, Canada has made slow but steady progress in the realization of gender equality domestically, seeking to implement our own federal plan for gender equality.

We have strengthened the machinery of government dedicated to this task, enacted new legislation and developed policies and programmes that have improved the lives of women. We continue to seek to mainstream gender into all aspects of government and its institutions, using gender-based analysis. Gender-based analysis has demonstrated its importance to the economic status of women in areas such as entrepreneurship, tax reform, pay equity and trade; and in areas of social policy such as pension benefits, assistance to low- and middle-income families, Centres of Excellence for Women's Health and extended parental leave benefits. We have strengthened Criminal Code provisions to address violence and will soon launch gender and peace-building training initiatives.

(*spoke in French*)

In spite of this progress, many societal and systemic barriers remain. Gender analysis has shown that, in a multicultural country such as ours, women's inequality is further compounded by such factors as diversity, race, ethnicity, immigrant and indigenous status, sexual orientation, disability and age.

(*spoke in English*)

Therefore, in Canada, recognition of diversity is extremely important.

Poverty remains a reality for many Canadian women, especially single parents and aboriginal, immigrant and disabled women. This underscores the reality that poverty is the single greatest barrier to access and participation, not only for women, but also for their children.

(*spoke in French*)

Violence against women in the home and in the community continues to be an impediment to the development of safe and secure communities.

(*spoke in English*)

In Canada, we do not believe that substantive progress towards equality for women can be achieved unless we work with non-governmental organizations, which are essential to the development of effective and practical public policy and whose advocacy continues to keep our Governments on track and focused on equality for women, who make up close to 52 per cent of our population.

Internationally, Canada is concerned and active in the development of protocols against human smuggling, whose primary targets, we know, are

women and children. We consider trafficking in humans to be a twenty-first century form of slavery and an absolute denial of human rights.

Our commitment to human rights is further evidenced in Canada's insistence on the establishment of an International Criminal Court. We consider this to be the most gender-sensitive piece of international humanitarian law and we are pleased with the recent adoption of the protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and children in armed conflict.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada is determined to continue to work to reduce the systemic barriers to women's equality, to increase awareness and appreciation of the benefits of human diversity, to research and advance the linkages between economic and social policy and to point out their interdependence.

(*spoke in English*)

The Beijing Platform for Action remains relevant and critically important to the achievement of these goals. It sets a benchmark upon which we must build, rather than deconstruct. When we deny women the right to justice and the opportunity to participate equally in all aspects of the economic, social, political and cultural life of their countries, we retard the social and economic development of these countries. We retard their competitiveness in the global arena and condemn their peoples to permanent and second-class status on the world stage. When we empower women, we empower their children and generations to come. When we protect women, we protect not only our daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, but also our sons and brothers.

We are convinced that the future economic and social development of Member States — and, indeed, of the world — will not progress unless women, who make up over 55 per cent of the world's human resources, have an opportunity to contribute. We also believe that the goals of peace and human security will remain forever elusive unless women are protected, respected and given a seat at the decision-making table.

We cannot, my friends, go backward. The Beijing Platform for Action is a beginning, not an end. The lives of women and children sit in the balance and their future lies in our hands.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Francesca Michelotti, Minister for Internal Affairs and Justice of San Marino.

Ms. Michelotti (San Marino): It is with great emotion that I convey to this special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", the greetings of the delegation of the Republic of San Marino.

The bold and far-reaching women's revolution continues irreversibly. Those describing this process as the greatest revolution or as the only revolution of our times are not referring exclusively to the fact that the "other half of the sky" is involved but, most significantly, to the comprehensive view of the world it fosters and the radical improvements it advocates.

Today, gathered in the United Nations building, we are finally exercising our right to express our opinions, which is a remarkable success, as we would have never expected that our personal, slow and tough struggle, along with that of many others, would make us the protagonists of our own destiny. Yet, for all the differences in the historical, social, cultural and economic backgrounds of our respective nations, this is the important achievement we all share.

This assembly provides an enriching opportunity for all women to go beyond their daily experiences and gain a wider perspective. Today, more than in the years of feminism in Europe and the Western world, of women's liberation, of their struggle for survival in Africa or the Americas and of their advancement in Asia and the Middle East, we are aware that any single identity cannot be disregarded when sharing views and experiences and that all cultural contributions are equally valuable. At the same time, we must avoid any oppressive or levelling attempt based on vague standards or schemes to be taken for granted.

This is the real significance of today's meeting. This is the challenge that all women can issue for a third millennium rich in expectations and potential attainments. Therefore, even the smallest nation in the world community can contribute to this global and many-sided debate with its own experiences. Also, in San Marino, women have been silent or silenced for a long time and very few have managed to express their thoughts or to have their voice heard. In our advanced societies, too often do women boast leadership in the world political, social and economic structure,

disregarding, however, that gender inequalities still deny women full access to those key positions where their decisions and choices would enhance their well-being and foster development.

A fundamental rethinking of all human rights and freedoms, as well as a redefinition of present social rules and organization, are a *sine qua non* condition for overhauling an inadequate or hostile male-dominated society, which necessarily depends on women's active participation if better prospects are to be attained.

Significant progress has been made over the last few decades thanks to the valuable cooperation offered by women. In every economic and social sector, and in a gender mainstreaming perspective, women have undertaken not only to eradicate marginalization, discrimination and exploitation, but also to bridge the wide gap between the North and the South.

Women's issues have thus offered new incentives — and will increasingly do so in the future — to think of a new economic world order, review the allocation of resources and reaffirm the safeguarding and protection of life on the planet.

The strength shown today by the women's movement worldwide is no longer confined to the mere search for a "development niche", but is rather the expression of an ongoing process that is irrevocably dismantling preordained schemes in the context of global development, coexistence between ethnic groups and cultures, and peace-building.

From family to school, from education to employment, from politics to personal well-being, the women's movement has imposed a new way of conceiving history, human relations and gender roles. It has focused greater attention on the relationships between environment and culture, natural differences and social discrimination, participation in public life and gender, and on reiterating and reasserting the right to one's own identity in the face of any simplistic or ambiguous attempt to level out diversities.

Bearing in mind that the experiences of each and every one of us highlight the paramount importance of the issues we are discussing, I wish to submit, on behalf of my delegation, some data on the status of women in San Marino. I am confident that this information will enrich our dialogue and provide food for thought.

As has been the case in all European countries, the path towards gender equality has been relatively easy for San Marino women too. Thanks to favourable economic conditions, we have achieved, more rapidly than elsewhere, important participation levels that are still unimaginable for most women in the world. Today a significant number of San Marino women hold intermediate and high-ranking positions in both the public and private sectors.

The entire population has access to social security and social support, and women can benefit from all necessary services. Wage equality between male and female workers is a consolidated achievement, as is trade union equality. The educational level is extremely high and diversified, and a wide range of opportunities are offered.

The process of achieving legal equality, however, unlike in other European countries, has been long and difficult and has not yet been completed successfully despite the country's widespread affluence. San Marino still lags behind in the area of legal equality, as is evidenced on the one hand by the low rate of female representation in Parliament and in politics, and on the other hand by the inadequate recognition of the right of women to transmit their nationality — a well-established achievement in all economically advanced countries.

Today we are still demanding to be effectively recognized "citizens as of right". In fact, this claim still encounters cultural and institutional opposition, which is by now anachronistic.

It is fundamental for San Marino women that citizenship be considered as an inherent right and not a strategic concession. This would imply the full acknowledgement of women's human and social contribution to the development of the country, full respect for its ancient democratic values and the preservation of its traditions, which could be disrupted as a consequence of globalization.

We will continue our battle with great determination, prompted by the conviction that our voice will be heard. At the same time, we are ready to pool our efforts and contribute, in every possible way, to women's liberation throughout the world.

The Republic of San Marino fully supports the worldwide women's movement, and in all international forums where it is present, it will back all initiatives

advocating and safeguarding women's rights, in the hope that everlasting peace and justice can thrive also in those countries where they are still hindered by violence.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Olga Dagel, Minister for Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

Mrs. Dagel (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me today to address the representatives of the international community from this lofty rostrum on the occasion of this special session of the General Assembly dedicated entirely to gender issues. The delegation of the Republic of Belarus expresses special gratitude to the United Nations for its ongoing attention to women's issues at the international level.

Owing to the perseverance of this Organization, gender equality is recognized today as one of the main goals of modern social development.

For the Republic of Belarus, the Beijing Platform for Action has become a basic instrument for the elaboration of a national strategy on the advancement of women. Having assessed its implementation, we can state that we have achieved considerable progress in this domain.

Thanks to the assistance and support of the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenka, and of the Government of our country, the National Plan of Action and the National Programme "Women of the Republic of Belarus" have been adopted and are being gradually implemented.

The establishment of the National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women has been practically completed. Our country's Government has approved the regulations for the National Council on Gender Policy.

Work to improve national legislation aimed at advancing the status of women and making it consistent with international standards is under way. This process is complemented by efforts to raise women's awareness on legal issues.

In addition to the international instruments already signed, our country's national process concerning the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been undertaken. Women's involvement in public, political and managerial activities is one of the main approaches for their attainment of equality. We are glad to note that in Belarus, women's participation in the decision-making process has been gradually expanding.

Gender statistics are being improved, and comparative analysis of women's and men's status is much easier to perform on a wider scale. The first statistical publication, *Women and Men in the Republic of Belarus*, has appeared. Gender research has become more widespread in Belarus. Its results are reflected in the national report entitled "Belarusian women as seen through an era", which was published under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project "Women in development".

Problems relating to the status of women are receiving more attention in the mass media. The gender education system has emerged. Gender issues have been introduced into the curricula of four Belarusian universities. These achievements can be fully shared with representatives of UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Children's Fund in our country.

Considerable changes are taking place in Belarusian society. Alongside a reappraisal of spiritual values, a new vision of women's place and role in society has emerged. Being aware that it is more difficult to overcome a period of crisis alone, women have begun to unite. As a result, a new phenomenon has appeared in the public life of our country: women's non-governmental organizations that cooperate quite actively with the Government on a regular basis. They participated actively in the discussion of the national report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Belarus at the conference organized within the framework of preparation for this special session. In our view, the report turned out to be comprehensive and well balanced. We are glad that we have been able to provide it to delegations today. We hope that our report will be Belarus's contribution to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing decisions.

Despite the measures taken, the situation of women in Belarus is still quite difficult. The obstacles impeding our progress include inadequate financial resources, aggravated by the need to allocate over 10 per cent of the State budget to eliminating the consequences of Chernobyl; strongly persistent

stereotypes related to the social roles played by men and women in society; and men's inadequate involvement in activities ensuring gender equality.

Taking this into consideration, the Government has decided to develop, by the end of the year 2000, a new Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women for 2001-2005. In designing this plan, the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, stemming from consideration of the Belarus's third periodical report last January, will be taken fully into account.

In the coming century we want the world to be based on love and responsibility, not on power and violence, which devastate human nature and the soul. To achieve this, it is necessary for women and men to become equal and to be equally responsible partners in every sphere of life. We hope that this special session will define ways to achieve the goals of Beijing. Our commitment to these goals is unanimously reaffirmed.

The President: I call on Her Excellency The Honourable Katia Bellilo, Minister of Equal Opportunities of Italy.

Ms. Bellilo (Italy) (*spoke in Italian*; *English text furnished by the delegation*): The documents we are about to adopt clearly express the political will and commitment of the Governments of the world to the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. For the Italian Government this commitment comes at the end of a long road that reached a turning point in 1996. A centre-left Government was elected, and it established for the first time ever, the position of Minister for Equal Opportunities.

The national report that summarizes our work from these years is available to all present, so I will not dwell on it. Instead, I would like to talk about problems that go beyond our national dimension, regarding the connection between the Beijing policies and the global challenges facing every country and the United Nations as a whole.

The first is the challenge of poverty. As the numbers tell us, poverty has the face of a woman. This is why Italy's development cooperation activities in Africa, the Balkans, Central America and elsewhere have focused on key policies to fight the social exclusion of women and empower them as agents of political change and economic development. This is true both in bilateral initiatives and in our enhanced support for international agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The second is the challenge of economic globalization. For globalization to become a source of new opportunities rather than new inequalities, we must also globalize human rights, equality and equal opportunities for all women and men throughout the world. It is on this basis that Italy has chosen to give priority to reducing the debt of the poorest countries and on the gender-sensitive social policies that should accompany this step — for example, through participatory decentralized development cooperation.

Thirdly, with regard to the challenge of preventing conflicts, we must come to terms with the tragic experience of recent years: wars generated by ethnic and religious intolerance, and characterized by a systematic attack on the bodies and freedom of women. To prevent such conflicts, political and peacekeeping measures are not enough. We need a vision of the future that sees diversity as an asset and that treasures the ability, first and foremost of women, to build coexistence on the basis of the concrete, diversified needs of individuals and communities.

In Europe we face these challenges every day. Together we are struggling to emerge from the devastating experience of the Balkans through cooperation, democracy and human rights. Again we are faced with the same challenge, in Sierra Leone, or in the Horn of Africa, where Italy is playing a leading role in efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. We cannot allow our perceptions of the African wars to be clouded by indifference, or worse, by racism. Nor can we forget that the victims, refugees fleeing from the Balkans and Africa, are for the most part women, and that women are the key actors, even in such extreme circumstances, ensuring care for their families and respect for human dignity.

On all these issues, there are close ties between the themes of today's special session and the themes of the upcoming Millennium Summit. This lends even greater urgency to our work today and to our future prospects. In that light, monitoring the will of Governments to implement their Beijing commitments is not a technical issue but a highly political one. Technical instruments are obviously needed, and so are international legal instruments. But above all, we need political instruments.

For several years now, Italy has been championing the reform and democratization of the United Nations. This reform need look no further than the experience of women for a wealth of ideas and proposals, starting with the ability of women to develop dialogue and partnerships in and with civil society. Without such partnerships, the United Nations of the new millennium will never get under way, nor will the global changes advocated by the United Nations conferences of the 1990s, which borrowed their legitimacy, energy and vision precisely from their dialogue with non-governmental organizations.

But today's movements are not always seeking dialogue. The Seattle march against the World Trade Organization and the Washington demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund were sometimes reactive rather than proactive. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore their voices. We must build new strategies that embrace the most forward-looking ideas that such protests have expressed. Likewise, we must seriously consider the proposals of the non-governmental organization forum and learn from the experience of women in the many movements which advocate all human rights for all.

Let me repeat that: all human rights for all women and all men. Social, cultural and economic rights, which in Europe mean first and foremost the right to work, in developing countries mean the right to people-centred sustainable development. As to civil and political rights, it is not enough to make these rights law if we do not tackle the democratic deficit represented by political, economic and social inequality between women and men. Last but not least are sexual and reproductive rights. We approved the substance of those rights in Cairo and in Beijing. Today we should no longer hesitate to call them by their proper name, and defend them against any and all violations, no matter who commits them.

As we did in Beijing and at the conferences of past decades, I hope we shall once again manage to find a consensus on these issues, with full respect for our political and cultural diversity. We have built a great heritage, a heritage that has given strength, authority and new political space to all of us, in government and in civil society. That is why decisions on whether to work towards a new world conference on women in future years or towards other common forums, on what those forums should be and on who should participate cannot simply be absorbed into a general debate on how to follow up the United Nations conferences of the 1990s.

Women are not one problem among many; they are half of humankind. In a globalized but paradoxically more fragmented and unequal world, women are the half that know how to find strength through dialogue and unity, through understanding diversity while upholding equality of rights. Women can overcome the boundaries that divide continents and cultures, North and South, institutional roles and grass-roots experience.

The United Nations of the year 2000 cannot do without that resource. Empowering women, through granting them decision-making powers and forums where their voices can be heard, is not a concession. It is an investment in our common future.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Indranie Chandarpal, Minister of Human Services and Social Security of Guyana.

Ms. Chandarpal (Guyana): This special session is an opportunity not only for review and assessment but also to propose bold new actions and initiatives for the further advancement of women in this new century. The Beijing Platform for Action has now been widely recognized as an invaluable tool for the social, economic and political empowerment of women throughout their life cycle. Gender mainstreaming and equal partnerships between women and men in all areas of development have been established as global strategies for promoting gender equality.

However, many of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action remain unfulfilled, reflecting to a large extent the gap between articulation and implementation of women's rights. Women continue to constitute the majority of people living in poverty, with little or no access to education and health services. Each year, more than a half a million women die from pregnancy-related causes, while another 23 million develop life-threatening complications which could have been avoided. Women from developing countries are the worst affected, representing more than 99 per cent of those deaths.

This situation exists despite rapidly increasing global income and the recognized link between improved economic power for women and their increased level of equality. It has been well established

that women with greater independent control of economic resources, including access to education and health services, have greater control over their own fertility and more say about their other rights and freedoms.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Platform for Action has underpinned a number of local strategies and initiatives undertaken by the Government of Guyana. The translation of gender-oriented policy and legislation into de facto equality for women has often required the adoption of special measures whose impact could be felt directly and immediately. Such measures have included the introduction of a poverty alleviation programme with an emphasis on women, which has served to reduce women's greater vulnerability to the effects of economic crisis and hardship. The Government of Guyana is also committed to providing safe water, housing, sanitation, health, public safety, transportation and other basic services to support women in their multiple roles.

Similarly, training programmes have been specifically targeted at women to improve their job opportunities and their ability to compete in the job market. A leading example in this field is the work being carried out by the Women's Leadership Institute, which was launched by the Government in 1997. The Institute's programmes are aimed at imparting skills and information for life and at empowering women to participate as leaders in local government, community development, environmental issues and entrepreneurial development.

Legislative reforms on issues affecting women have moreover been promoted. In 1995, the medical termination of pregnancy act was enacted in Guyana with a view to decriminalizing abortions. The act provides not only the legal framework for clinically safer options for women desirous of terminating pregnancies but also serves as a means of safeguarding women and girls from unsafe abortions. Similarly, the adoption of the domestic violence act in 1996 was a definitive step by the Government of Guyana to eliminate domestic violence, which affects women from all socio-economic strata of society.

Ms. Yai (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

A national steering committee, consisting of 33 national organizations, has been formed to address the eradication of family violence. A legal aid centre has been established through a joint Government and non-governmental organization initiative to offset the financial burden of legal fees that women face in the resolution of their domestic and other legal battles. Shelters are now available to provide safety and counselling for abused women and children. An organization entitled "Men against Violence against Women" has also been launched. In addition, thousands of men have signed on to the Guyana Human Rights Association campaign to eradicate violence and to develop awareness, particularly within the male community, about the abuse of women.

Another important demarche to protect the rights of women was the 1996 National Policy Paper on Women. It identified a number of broad principles on which the Government's policy on women is based.

Through its ministries and agencies, the Government of Guyana has continued to develop policies and programmes to promote the equality of women in law in keeping with its undertakings as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We are working towards the transformation of cultural attitudes, customs and practices that discriminate against women. We consider the adoption in 1997 of the Prevention of Discrimination Act as a step in the right direction to prohibit discrimination against women, particularly on the grounds of pregnancy.

The five-year National Plan of Action on Women, Guyana's national development strategy, and reforms of the national constitution have all been drafted in keeping with the Government's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. A gender-mainstreaming approach has been developed for Constitutional reforms, as well as for the development strategy, which is a multisectoral development plan for the nation. I am pleased to announce agreement by all political parties to undertake to ensure that at least one third of all their candidates are women.

The spirit of Beijing has been visible and has been a strong force for change in Guyana's society, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic response of both men and women to various programmes and activities for the advancement of women. We have witnessed meetings and gatherings transcending race, religion, sex and political barriers to protest violence against

women. This atmosphere has indeed rejuvenated and increased the number of women's organizations, with non-governmental organizations — estimated to be 65 in number and located throughout the country — giving spirited support to all issues of women's rights. Many of our successful women are acting as role models and mentors for women and girls nationwide.

In 1997, Guyana was pleased to host a post-Beijing conference for the Caribbean Community countries, which resulted in the Georgetown Consensus for the advancement of women.

Our own experience has taught us that women's advancement depends greatly on political will and commitment, the outlay of adequate resources and the involvement of women as equal partners in policies and decisions that affect their lives. Despite our best efforts, however, poverty alleviation continues to remain a formidable challenge. In these circumstances, we must reiterate the call for urgent international action to address the development challenges of developing countries. Much-needed resources for health, education, employment-generation and social protection are being constrained by high debt-servicing bills, inadequate markets for our exports, volatile terms of trade and trade barriers to our products, among other problems.

The outpouring of goodwill and support for programmes aimed at gender equality are but the culmination of the momentum that started in 1975, gathered strength in 1980 and 1985 and continued through to 1995. It may be appropriate to posit the view that we are all safely on a journey in which there will be no U-turns. We cannot allow the gains achieved since Beijing to be eroded. I call on all of us to recommit ourselves and provide the leadership to promote and protect the rights of women and girls worldwide. It is the hope of the delegation of Guyana that the outcome document we adopt at this special session will provide even greater impetus to global efforts towards gender equality, development and peace in this new century.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. John O'Donoghue, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform of Ireland.

Mr. O'Donoghue (Ireland): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for all their work for this special session of the General Assembly.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action signalled a commitment on the part of Governments to international norms in gender equality, to the elimination of discrimination against women and to the removal of obstacles to equality for women. Ireland fully endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The actions agreed at Beijing are being assimilated into Irish Government policy in a manner appropriate to Irish conditions.

The five years since the Beijing Platform for Action have seen major changes in Ireland, in terms of both the legislative framework and Irish society generally. Many major ground-breaking pieces of rights-based legislation have been passed in Ireland in the last two years. These include the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000. The Employment Equality Act, 1998 came into operation on 18 October 1999. The Act prohibits discrimination in relation to employment on nine grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

What is particularly significant about this legislation is the widening of the grounds from gender and marital status to include the other seven grounds mentioned. We are all aware that women often face double discrimination, both on the grounds of their gender and for other reasons, such as race or disability. This legislation should help to address this problem.

Perhaps even more ground-breaking is the Equal Status Act, 2000, which prohibits discrimination on similar grounds in the non-employment area. It was signed into law in April and will come into force later this year. It applies to any goods and services which are available to the public, whether payment is involved or not, irrespective of whether the service is provided by the public or private sector.

Human rights are an essential prerequisite for gender equality, and I am glad to be able to point to very significant developments in Ireland on this issue. The Human Rights Commission Act, 2000, which provides for the establishment of a human rights commission, was signed into law last month. Furthermore, legislation is being prepared to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Irish law.

The unprecedented economic growth in Ireland in recent years has been the catalyst for major change in Irish society and has had a particular impact on the role of women. The participation of women in the labour force has risen from a relatively low level to over 47 per cent. We are committed to supporting those women who wish to gain access or return to the workforce or who wish to avail themselves of training or educational opportunities through policies such as gender mainstreaming and support for childcare provision.

We are also taking steps to ensure that the demands which our buoyant economy is making for increased numbers in the workforce does not result in any devaluing of the role of women who choose to work in the home. It was only in the 1970s in Ireland that women were given a statutory right to remain in paid employment after marriage. That choice was hard won. The choice of women to remain at home to care for their children or elders should not be lost. Towards this end, our social security and tax policies have been used to support care providers in their role through improvements in the care providers allowance scheme, the introduction of a special tax allowance for care providers and improved pension arrangements.

In 1998, 96 per cent of 16-year-old females and 77 per cent of 17-year-old females were in full-time education. The corresponding figures for males were 88 per cent and 73 per cent. Upper secondary graduation rates for women in Ireland exceed those for men by 14 percentage points, the greatest difference in all Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. However, the Irish Government is aware that difficulties still exist in relation to female education. For example, girls are still under-represented in technical and engineering subjects in schools, and the entrance of females into engineering degree courses is still only 17 per cent on average, but at some institutions still as low as 2 per cent. Some disadvantaged women still have difficulty gaining access to education and training.

A review is being undertaken of the overall structures for the monitoring and implementation of present commitments in relation to gender equality. While much progress has been made, it is agreed that there is still some way to go to achieve full gender equality in Irish society. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in Ireland has started work on the development of a National Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2000-2005. Consultation with non-governmental organizations will be an important part of the work of developing the Action Plan.

Ireland's overseas aid development programme, Ireland Aid, has long realized that women bear the brunt of financial and social inequity. As part of the preparation for and follow-up to Beijing, Ireland Aid undertook a major review of existing gender activities in its programme. This led to the adoption of formal Gender Guidelines in 1996. Ireland Aid's approach attempts to consider the impact on both women and men as an integral part of all projects, from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

The 1999 review of Ireland Aid carried out by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD commented favourably on Ireland's efforts to mainstream gender into our bilateral aid programmes. In addition, Ireland, together with its European Union partners, continues to monitor European Union projects to ensure that they comprehensively address gender issues.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Ireland supports the Platform for Action and agrees that there should be no renegotiation of the text and actions agreed in 1995. We must build on the achievements of Beijing and adopt an outcome document that will move the agenda forward in practical ways and ensure that genuine equality becomes a fact of life for women and men throughout the world.

I wish the Assembly every success in the remaining days of this special session.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Zobaida Jalal, Minister for Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education of Pakistan.

Ms. Jalal (Pakistan): On behalf of my delegation, I wish to congratulate the President of the General Assembly at this very special session on his election. I also wish to thank Ms. Christine Kapalata, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, and her colleagues for their hard work during the preparatory process for this session.

The Fourth World Conference in Beijing provided a major impetus to international and national efforts aimed at the advancement and empowerment of women. This special session will reinforce and reinvigorate the process that we collectively initiated five years ago.

Over the past half century, the women's rights movement has made important strides. Today, there is universal recognition that the status and role of women in society is intrinsically linked to the economic progress and prosperity of nations. It is now accepted that no country can achieve and sustain prosperity if nearly half of its population remains neglected and excluded from the national development process. Despite these positive trends, we still have a long way to go for the realization of the objectives of the Beijing Conference.

We live in a world marked by diversity of cultures, races, beliefs and religions. This diversity, indeed, is our greatest strength. It is imperative that we respect each other's views, religious beliefs and value systems, and avoid the stereotyping of any religion. Misplaced notions of the superiority of one value system over others and attempts to impose the norms of one society on another defeat the very principle of freedom of choice and the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. However, we also recognize that certain core values are universal and must be respected by all.

We in Pakistan believe that our religion establishes ideals and norms that are exemplary for a social vision to ensure dignity, security, equality and full participation of women in the economic and political mainstream of the national life. Islam proscribes discrimination against women and fully protects their fundamental human rights. It gives full recognition to the role of women in the economic and social progress of nations. Based on Islamic precepts, our Constitution guarantees the status and dignity of women and forbids discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste or sex.

My Government believes in translating the rhetoric of women's rights into reality, and to this end it has undertaken a number of substantive initiatives. Thus, we have seven women ministers holding important portfolios ranging from health and education to law and justice; four of them are part of the Pakistan delegation to this session. At the institutional level, we have strengthened the Federal Ministry and provincial departments for women's development and established a permanent National Commission on the Status of Women to oversee, coordinate and accelerate national efforts for the empowerment of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The Federal Ministry and provincial departments are being assisted by advisory boards comprising representatives of women's organizations on all policy and administrative issues. Other steps include the reform and revision of laws that discriminate against women, the reservation of 30 per cent of seats for women in national and provincial legislatures and 50 per cent representation in the grass-roots representative bodies and increasing the quota for women candidates in public sector employment. Measures have also been taken to initiate prosecution in cases of domestic violence, address sexual harassment in the workplace, generate awareness against early marriages, improve conditions for women prisoners and strengthen family courts to effectively remedy marital disputes.

The existence of violence against women in every society remains a painful reality of our times. We must reinforce our efforts to eliminate this evil. The incidence of violence against women and girls becomes even more acute in situations of armed conflicts. My heart goes out in sympathy and solidarity to women and girls who have suffered and, in some cases, continue to suffer the most egregious human rights violations and physical abuse in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Jammu and Kashmir.

We therefore note with satisfaction that the Statute of the International Criminal Court has designated the physical abuse of women as a crime against humanity. The perpetrators of such heinous crimes should be awarded exemplary punishments. In Pakistan, we regard any form of discrimination or violence against women and girls as an unacceptable criminal offence. We are also conscious that, apart from being a human rights issue, it has enormous social and economic costs for society as a whole.

The Government of Pakistan has therefore taken a number of measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Recently, the Chief Executive of Pakistan declared so-called "honour killings" to be premeditated murder. This has been done to ensure maximum punishments for the perpetrators of such abhorrent crimes. I would also like to take this opportunity to urge our partners in other parts of the world where honour killings are depicted as crimes of passion to adopt similar rigorous legal measures.

Since the Beijing Conference, we have focused our attention on reviewing and consolidating policy

and strengthening institutional and administrative actions with a view to enhancing the capability of every woman and girl child in Pakistan to enable her active, visible participation in the political process and effective decision-making, from the household to the highest levels of national public affairs; making adequate provisions to expand, enhance and sustain the access of women and children to the best possible health care services, education and skill development, housing, social welfare and rehabilitation of the disabled through grass roots community-development programmes; evaluating and quantifying the role and contribution of women in production and services, measuring the disparities in access to productive resources and determining the incidence of feminization of poverty; and taking immediate steps to rectify imbalances in resource allocation to the social sector by undertaking investment in development and providing adequate social security safeguards to protect weaker segments of society, particularly women and girls, against the negative impact of globalization.

Universal literacy and quality education are key to the empowerment of women and girls. The objective of education for all has been one of the priority areas of our national plan of action as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Other priority areas have been health and access to productive resources. To achieve these objectives, we have taken major initiatives under our Social Action Programme, which focuses on the expansion of female literacy through conventional and non-conventional education, skill training, market absorption through entrepreneurial advice, the provision of micro-finance and the renewal of curriculum and teaching methodologies for creating greater gender sensitivity. The Social Action Programme pays special attention to reducing maternal mortality, to maternity care and to malnutrition through a life cycle approach to women's heath care and a closer integration of health and population welfare activities.

We are particularly concerned by the feminization of poverty. Therefore, in our poverty reduction programme, which has been strengthened by the diversion of 7 billion rupees from the defence budget despite prevailing tensions in the region, we have taken targeted actions to address this problem.

We regard the family as a source of social cohesion and stability. It plays an important role in reducing the incidence of poverty through traditional support systems and provides the crucial link between the individual and society, as well as the State. We therefore fully incorporate this important role of the family in our development planning.

Despite all these initiatives and efforts, like other developing countries we face formidable challenges in the realization of the goals of the Beijing Conference. Some of these are associated with the process of globalization, which has largely worked to the disadvantage of developing countries. Others pertain to resource constraints owing to declining commodity prices, lack of access to international markets and inequitable trading regimes. We believe that international cooperation and solidarity were never so vital as they are today in launching collective efforts to achieve sustained economic growth, sustainable development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Let us pledge at this historic moment to join hands to reinforce endeavours to realize the vision of a society in which every woman and man can live in equality, prosperity and peace in the new century.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Deputy Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Ms. Jalil (Malaysia): I would like to join other speakers in extending my congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia on his election as the President of the General Assembly at this twenty-third special session.

Malaysia regards the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through this special session of the General Assembly as a critical moment in the history of the intervention of the United Nations in promoting the advancement of women. In recognition of the seriousness of this occasion, Malaysia has, in its 27-member delegation, 15 elected women representatives from the state and federal legislatures, academicians, scholars, and professionals, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations. Their presence here is a reflection of the strong commitment of the Malaysian Government to an inclusive and participatory governance for the advancement of women. In fact, I would say with confidence that the political will of the Government of Malaysia to improve the status of women has never wavered since the Declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women.

As a multiracial and multireligious society with a Muslim majority, Malaysia has proven to the world that Islam is not a deterrent to the advancement of women. Indeed, the true teaching of Islam values women as equal to men and has laid the foundation for a society where women and men should work towards a meaningful partnership.

Based on this principle, Malaysia views with grave concern the politicizing of culture and religion for creating power bases. The negative impact of this trend is the denial of the rights of women to education and work, to equal access to and control over resources, to personal security and safety, to independence and to decision-making in the private and public spheres. On this special occasion, Malaysia would like to urge Governments and the international community to monitor and curb the subversive use of culture and religion that denies women their rights.

Malaysia values the contribution of its women to the development of the country. Comprising nearly half of Malaysia's productive workforce, women are a valuable asset to our nation-building. Regardless of race and religion, they have made remarkable progress in almost every sector and level. With better educational facilities and opportunities, women in Malaysia have achieved almost 100 per cent literacy. At work, women have entered into what used to be male preserves and have made significant headway in their chosen fields, including the corporate arena. Many women have managed to break the proverbial glass ceiling. The Government's recognition of women's potential is reflected in their holding positions both in the public and the private sectors. Recently, a woman was appointed Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia, not to mention many other women who for some time have been appointed as cabinet ministers, including the Minister of International Trade and Industry.

However, these achievements do not mean that our task of promoting the advancement of women has been fully accomplished. In this rapidly changing world, progress is not made by merely taking pride in our present achievements, but by critically examining the situation and constantly assessing our strategies, methods and outcomes and by being prepared to face reality. We believe in a holistic approach to a balanced development that embodies all aspects of social development, which include all citizens, men and women, the poor, the unemployed and disadvantaged groups. Currently, a serious effort is being made to mainstream gender perspectives in all major public policies.

In spite of being a developing nation, we speak with commitment, and we continuously strive for excellence in all our endeavours. In our struggle for the advancement of women in the twenty-first century, we will continue to work harder to change the way women are perceived in society, and, most importantly, the way women perceive themselves. These certainly need a paradigm shift, in terms of both mentality and attitude by women and men alike.

When we met in Beijing in 1995, most of us were still enjoying rapid economic growth. Today the situation has changed. In Iraq, for instance, the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations have had an adverse impact on the Iraqi population, particularly women and children. On humanitarian grounds, Malaysia urges the United Nations to immediately lift the sanctions. Our hearts also go out to the grieving mothers, wives and daughters in Kuwait on account of the unknown fates of their loved ones since the end of the Gulf war.

In the Asian region, the currency crisis that swept across the region has thrown the economic achievements of Asia into disarray. However, Malaysia is lucky to have a very strong and capable leadership, and we have managed, in our own way, to overcome the problem. This has meant that we have been able to continue with our programmes for the advancement of women. Using multipronged and multidisciplinary strategies, we will continue to improve education and training for women to enable them to meet the labour requirements and challenges of the twenty-first century.

Today, in Malaysia, the "knowledge economy" has become our focus. Our vision in this regard is very clear. We are committed to the orderly development of a knowledge-based society. We cannot but aspire to the highest standards with regard to the skills of our people, their devotion to knowledge and the upgrading of that knowledge, and their self-improvement. To ensure that we can adapt to the challenges of this "knowledge economy", the Government has explicitly stressed that it is necessary to ensure that all Malaysians undergo a paradigm shift: a fundamental move from a production-driven economy to a knowledge based-economy.

This special session provides an excellent opportunity for us all to take stock of the lessons and experiences of the past, and to look forward to new ideas and future directions. On this historic occasion, Malaysia would like to reiterate its commitment to the advancement of women. In formulating our Eighth Malaysia Development Plan, we will ensure that gender issues and gender budgets are fully integrated, and, most importantly, we will ensure that the principle of equality between men and women is incorporated.

Lastly, our Government will continue to strengthen the smart partnership with all women's non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The non-governmental organizations and a number of private organizations in Malaysia are very committed to advancing the status of women, and the Malaysian Government recognizes that their role in supporting and complementing the Government's efforts is of paramount importance. We will continue, *inshallah*, to work harder to strengthen our capacities and capabilities, and together we will move forward to greater heights in achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform of Action.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Mirjana Lazarova-Trajkovska, Assistant Minister for Internal Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mrs. Lazarova-Trajkovska (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, allow me to express my satisfaction at having the honour and privilege to address this important forum. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the President and Bureau of the special session on their election and to wish them success in the performance of their responsible duties. I am convinced that their active engagement and participation will contribute greatly to the success of the special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

(*spoke in Macedonian; English text furnished by the delegation*)

It is an undeniable fact that women's rights represent an integral part of human rights. On the basis of this axiom, the international community has for several decades been successfully mustering the political will for the global promotion of the status of women through numerous activities carried out by the United Nations and regional organizations. This process has resulted in the significant development of international legal standards regarding women's rights and their implementation.

The beginning of the new millennium is the right moment to reaffirm the commitments defined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to recapitulate what has been achieved in the period since the Beijing Conference. In this respect, it is necessary to underscore the historic importance and the impact of the Beijing Conference and Platform for Action. In the last five years, the issue of gender equality and the strengthening of women's rights as basic human rights has been a focus of the political platforms of States, which, through coordinated action with women's movements, have worked on the realistic implementation of gender equality in societies.

However, we are still far from attaining our goal. Five years after Beijing, we need critically to revise the global strategy in order to make this century one of gender equality. In this connection, the Republic of Macedonia has supported, and has actively participated in, the preparatory activities for this special session. I am convinced, therefore, that this forum represents a decisive opportunity to identify the key areas in this sphere, which will define our future commitments to the promotion of gender equality.

The universality of human rights is indisputable. The fundamental principle of non-discrimination has been widely accepted and incorporated in the legal systems of most States. However, a large number of women still face various forms of gender discrimination. Therefore, one of the most efficient ways of eliminating gender discrimination — the importance of doing which was underscored at the Vienna Conference and endorsed at Beijing — is establishing an international mechanism for filing individual petitions regarding violations of obligations undertaken following accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The adoption of the Optional Protocol to this Convention is a big step forward, and its entry into force will for the first time enable an international body to review individual petitions regarding gender discrimination. The Republic of Macedonia has signed this Protocol and is committed to its ratification. It is important that the implementation of this significant instrument soon becomes a reality.

The problems that women face in promoting their status in society are numerous and complex. Undoubtedly, the most appalling of these is the traffic in women and children. Trafficking in their bodies and lives, as well as the various forms of child sexual abuse is the greatest hypocrisy of humanity. It directly destroys human dignity and personal integrity and represents a violation of the most basic human rights, while at the same time being a complex problem related to poverty and organized crime. Therefore, the fight against this evil is difficult and often fails. This fight needs to be uncompromising.

The Republic of Macedonia strongly supports the efforts and measures of the international community in this respect. We especially support the work of the Ad Hoc Committee preparing the two protocols to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The two protocols will contribute to the prevention of trafficking in human beings and thus to securing direct protection of women and children. The Republic of Macedonia hopes that these two very important instruments will soon be finalized.

In this context, the Republic of Macedonia welcomes the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which punishes child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography. I will soon sign this protocol.

In addition to the global strategy for the elimination of gender discrimination, a comprehensive national strategy and programme of action must be designed. That strategy must adjust global aims to local needs, and its implementation will ultimately produce the desired results. On the basis of needs at the national level, the Republic of Macedonia is devoting due attention to the gender perspective. In this regard, and in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government adopted the national action plan. It is a comprehensive development document which identifies problems and formulates priority activities and strategic measures for the promotion of the status of women in the Republic of Macedonia.

Considering that gender equality has been established at the legislative level for quite some time, one of the basic priorities of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is to promote the implementation of this fundamental principle. A crucial point is the participation of women in decision-making processes, particularly with regard to political decision-making. Given that a large number of women in the Republic of Macedonia are highly educated and represent half of the intellectual and labour potential of the State, there are preconditions for improving this situation. In order to achieve better results, the national action plan envisages the establishment of a governmental body to deal with gender-related issues.

In 1998, with the aim of increasing the number of women in politics, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a declaration on equal gender participation in the decision-making processes. While the declaration produced certain effects on the most recent parliamentary elections, the number of women in Parliament and Government is still insufficient and cannot have a determining impact on decision-making.

Unfavourable representation of women in political decision-making is a feature of the entire region of south-eastern Europe. This is the primary reason for deciding the basic motto of the Stability Pact working group on gender equality: Greater empowerment of women in south-eastern Europe. The Republic of Macedonia participates in the projects and activities of this working group. One of the proposed initiatives is the establishment of a women's lobby to fight prejudice regarding traditional gender roles, to encourage women to political engagement and to lobby the public and political parties for inclusion of more women in the electoral candidates lists. The women's lobby in the Republic of Macedonia was established in March 2000 and is very active. We hope that the results of its activities will be visible, even as early as the local elections to be held in autumn.

The Republic of Macedonia is very active in intergovernmental cooperation with the Council of Europe. In this respect, it is a great honour for us to have been entrusted with organizing, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, the European ministerial conference on gender equality in Skopje in 2002.

In conclusion, allow me once again to express my conviction that the results of this forum will represent a turning point in the global strategy for the promotion of the status of women in all societies.

The President: I now call on Ms. Susan Mubarak, President of the National Council for Women and Chairperson of the delegation of Egypt.

Ms. Mubarak (Egypt): On behalf of the Egyptian delegation, I welcome this opportunity to be among so

many partners of diverse experience, cultures and history who are here to reaffirm our commitment to Beijing and our determination to accelerate the advancement of women. Let me just emphasize that we are not here to reopen the debate or go back on the collective agreements and decisions adopted at Beijing and Cairo. Rather, we are here to move forward and pave the way for the empowerment of women.

As partners working together on both the national and international levels, we know that we can make a difference to ensure gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century. Partnerships are the most effective channel for broad-based consensus on both economic and social priorities, but effective partnerships are difficult to forge. This is particularly true during periods of rapid change. In an increasingly globalized world, it is those countries that are most responsive to change that are best able to meet the development challenges of the twenty-first century. However, there is a cost in unregulated change. The pace of change must match the economic, social and political realities of each country. At the national level, any change must be supported by economic growth that creates livelihood opportunity, since growth without equity is a prescription for social strife.

We are also aware that there are fundamental inequities of power among different social groups in society. Interest groups and power elites often act as gatekeepers to Government-provided services or are characterized by views that may conflict with sound development policies. Additionally, attitudinal barriers can act as key obstacles faced by nations as they attempt to integrate change and innovation into their traditional societies. We must therefore strive to modify attitudes and mindsets without undermining the social fabric and cohesiveness of our nations.

The President returned to the Chair.

Moreover the demands made by international development partners, whose agendas and prescriptions often draw attention to the obstacles faced by our developing countries, often fail to show the necessary will and commitment to reduce the cost and risk that comes with rapid change. All parties at the global level should be willing to redress the balance of power in favour of the weaker members of the community of nations, while working towards the enhancement of social progress and the more equitable distribution of resources between North and South.

We all agree that the advancement of women is essential for true democracy, balanced decision-making and effective management of social and economic resources. But how many countries can truly achieve our stated aims without the donor community providing sufficient official development assistance resources to meet the 0.7 per cent and the 20/20 targets.

In Egypt, the National Council for Women has adopted the notion of partnership among the Government, non-governmental organizations and local communities. Our experience shows that the most successful women's programmes are those that work directly with the grass roots, reach large numbers, have well defined criteria for eligibility and monitoring, and provide tangible incentives to the target beneficiaries.

For 25 years now, women's issues have been on the global agenda. Indeed, this has made a major contribution to identifying problems and proposing solutions. However, we must caution that our task is still far from accomplished. We need to rally all our forces to move forward. The Secretary-General, in his eloquent remarks yesterday, vividly portrayed for us the complex problems facing women worldwide in their societies. This situation has been aggravated by the socio-economic conditions of many countries.

It is in that context that I would like to propose an initiative similar to the Global Environment Facility, such as a trust fund for women or a global facility for women. Such a facility would act as an umbrella for existing institutions, programmes and funds charged with the formulation of strategies. It would also consolidate efforts that are now fragmented and would increase resources for meeting priority areas of universal concern identified in Beijing and beyond.

Finally, I need hardly stress that the role of the United Nations family of organizations is as important in the development sphere as it is in the political and security spheres. There can be no lasting stability without progress on the development front. We therefore hope that the international donor community, together with the United Nations system, will match their partnership rhetoric with concrete action for better coordination, better-targeted support and a larger flow of aid resources.

We trust that at this special session members will agree on action-oriented recommendations to be submitted to the Millennium Summit next September so that the gender file can find its rightful place on the

United Nations agenda for the twenty-first century. I wish the debate a successful outcome.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Win Mra, Chairman of the delegation of Myanmar.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): My delegation is very happy to see you, Sir, presiding over this special session on promoting a cause that is dear to all of us: "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". I would like to assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation as we work for a fruitful outcome of this very important special session of the General Assembly.

This special session has provided us with a welcome opportunity to review and appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, and to adopt a new strategy containing further actions and initiatives to accelerate the implementation of the Platform. In Beijing, the delegation of Myanmar apprised the international community of the status of Myanmar women, who enjoy unique equality with men as their inherent right. My delegation would now like to inform the Assembly of what the Government of Myanmar has undertaken since Beijing in order to achieve gender equality, development and peace.

Ms. Yai (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

But first, let me refresh our collective memory by recalling once again that in Myanmar all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of race, religion, status or sex. Women also enjoy equal political, economic, social and cultural rights. Since Beijing, we have systematically instituted a national machinery and programmes for the promotion of the advancement of women. On 3 July 1996, the Myanmar national committee was established to carry out activities for the advancement of women, and that day was designated as Myanmar Women's Day. Working committees were also formed at the national, state-division, district and township levels.

As a follow-up action to the Beijing Conference, Myanmar became a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in July 1997, and its initial report has been submitted.

In August 1997, the National Committee for Women's Affairs adopted the Myanmar national action plan for the advancement of women. Six areas — education, health, economy, culture, the girl child and violence against women — have been identified as critical areas that are considered to be most relevant for the advancement of the women of Myanmar. Recently, two new critical areas, environment and the media, have been added, and subcommittees have been formed in each of those areas. Here, my delegation would like to highlight the area of violence against women. In Myanmar, violence against women and girl children does not pose a major problem. However, we take this issue very seriously. The sub-committees on violence against women and girl children have been active in protecting women and girl children against violence. Suppression of the exploitation of those vulnerable groups is given special attention by the Government, as well as by various organizations. The Government has also strengthened legislation in those areas. Counselling centres for the victims of violence have been established throughout the country, and individuals can file complaints directly with the committee. In April 1998, a law amending the suppression of prostitution act of 1949 was enacted to further strengthen the existing law. Under existing laws, heavy penalties, including life sentences in jail, may be imposed for sexual abuse and rape.

Although eight areas have been identified, the remaining areas of women and poverty, women's human rights and women at the decision-making level are given due attention, since the areas of concern of the Platform for Action are interrelated and interdependent. The policies and programmes of the Government became more effective with the participation of the National Committee. Plans have also been made to collect gender-related data in these areas.

The National Committee enhances the cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations in implementing the National Plan of Action. A non-governmental organization, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, which has branches and associations all over the country at the grass-roots level, is dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of mothers and children. Similarly, the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association has been active in enhancing the role of Myanmar women in business. Some of the

successful activities of the association include transfer of technology and income-generating programmes for rural women, as well as credit and loan schemes for women.

Religion and culture in Myanmar influence the behaviour of men and women alike. Even in the age of globalization — perhaps even because of it — it is important to give due regard to the role that culture can play in promoting women's rights. Here, I wish to emphasize the important influence of Myanmar culture not only in promoting positive impulses but also in inhibiting excesses. Because of strong cultural and religious influences, there is little or no discrimination against women and the girl child, and cases of violence against them are rare. Therefore, in promoting women's rights, my delegation strongly believes that cultural diversity must be taken into consideration.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to highlight the fact that the promotion of women's rights needs a conducive environment of peace and development. In conflict situations and in situations of abject poverty, it is the vulnerable groups, including women and the girl child, who suffer most and who suffer foremost. This fact has been vividly apparent in the various conflicts that we are witnessing today. In Myanmar, the Government has been taking concerted measures to bring national unity to a country that was plagued by insurgency for over 40 years. My delegation is happy to say that for the first time in recent history, we have been able to put a stop to the internecine fighting among our national brethren and bring peace and stability to our country. As a result, we are now able to exploit our resources and concentrate our energies on economic development. It is in this environment of peace, stability and economic growth that we intend to promote the cause of women and the girl child in Myanmar. It is a worthy cause. It is a precious cause. It is a cause that is dear to the hearts of the people of Myanmar, both women and men.

In conclusion, may I assure the Assembly that Myanmar will redouble its efforts in promoting the rights of women and the girl child in an environment of peace, stability and development.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session. I can assure him that my delegation is fully ready to cooperate with him so as to bring the work of this session to a successful conclusion and enable it to achieve its objectives, as expected by the international community, with a view to enhancing the advancement of women and overcoming the obstacles impeding their advancement.

My delegation has examined the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In this regard, we listened to the important statement made yesterday by the Secretary-General, who gave an account of developments and trends and referred to various measures and actions being taken. We endorse his comments, which are aimed at achieving the advancement and promotion of women so that they can fully realize their political rights and play their role in the economic and social fields.

We welcome the ideas contained in the report under consideration, and we should like to stress two points. First, my delegation concurs with the goals indicated in the report of the Secretary-General relating to combating poverty by creating a favourable and inclusive economic and political environment. It supports the further political and economical empowerment of women by strengthening their participation in the decision-making process, by identifying concrete international, regional and national objectives as a means of eradicating poverty among them, and by establishing a monitoring mechanism to this end.

My delegation supports the proposal to make special efforts during the Millennium Assembly, to be held in September this year, with a view to developing a world strategy for the eradication of poverty that would give due regard to gender issues. Kuwait encourages the participation of women on an equal footing with men in the elaboration of economic and social policies, especially in the development of programmes relating to economic stability and of polices and legislation relating to health care, childcare and the role of women in processes of privatization taking place in the public sector.

Secondly, my delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that it is not possible to implement the strategic goals contained in the Beijing Platform for Action relating to armed conflict except by

implementing the existing legal criteria enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the principles of international humanitarian law. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, Kuwait set up a national standing committee to implement the Platform for Action. The committee members include representatives of the various ministries and of civil society. This committee was entrusted with the elaboration of a Kuwaiti strategy and plan of action for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

We established a women's section within the Department for Women and Children's Affairs, in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in May 1997. Its first task is to elaborate an integrated plan for the promotion of Kuwaiti women based on the values of our society and the teachings of our righteous Islamic religion. The second task is to elaborate and follow up a programme for women's activities with a view to enabling them to carry out their cultural and social functions. Its third task is to follow up the implementation of international Arab conventions and treaties relating to women and families. The fourth task is to contribute to the development of activities, programmes and policies for training Kuwaiti women. The fifth task is to raise women's awareness and to ensure they are fully conscious of their rights and duties relating to the family and society.

Women in Kuwait enjoy full legal personhood from birth, and the State of Kuwait recognizes the rights corresponding to that personhood. The law entitles women to defend those rights and preserve them. It would be no exaggeration for us to say Islam guarantees women's rights and dignity to a greater extent than other religions. Kuwaiti law entitles women to defend and preserve those rights, and it penalizes any abuse of women. This is stipulated in article 29 of the Constitution, which states that all persons are equal in human dignity, before the law, in public duties and in rights, regardless of gender, race, religion or language.

Kuwait signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 17 January 1994. Article 44 of the Kuwaiti Constitution guarantees every citizen's right to work and to choose his or her type of work, not to mention the women's right to carry out professional and commercial activities.

Women constitute 33.5 per cent of the total national workforce, across various sectors. This is a reflection of Kuwaiti women's awareness of the importance and necessity of effective participation in the process of social and economic development, which has led them to fill the highest posts in the State. Kuwaiti women participate in many social and media activities through women's societies that guide and organize their activities. Those societies enjoy the full support of the Government, which provides them with the necessary financial and moral support. This leads to the further advancement of Kuwaiti women and provides them with the opportunity to participate effectively, fully and freely in the building of modern Kuwaiti society.

Despite efforts made by the Government to strengthen the role of women in the life of society and in overcoming the obstacles that impede this process, Kuwaiti women still suffer from social and psychological problems because of the loss of a parent, brother, sister or husband. It is an open secret that Iraqi prisons still hold Kuwaiti citizens and nationals of third parties. This suffering is deepened because of the Iraqi procrastination, as for nine years now Iraq has not freed the Kuwaiti prisoners-of-war or made information about their fate public. This is crystal-clear from the Iraqi Government's boycott of the meetings of the international Tripartite Commission responsible for captives and prisoners-of-war from Kuwait and countries.

The issue of prisoners-of-war and captives is a purely humanitarian issue that must not be politicized or used as a tool for blackmail. This is in no one's interests. Our clear commitment to the Platform for Action and to respect for the cultural, historical and religious specificities of peoples is a main factor in the promotion of women and in activating their principal role in the construction of society in a full partnership with men, based on equality in rights and duties. Kuwait has always ensured that the process of development in all sectors is a strategic objective and that the development of women, the strengthening of their capabilities and the preservation of their dignity is a matter of conviction stemming from our commitment to the tolerant principles of the Islamic shariah, which granted women their full rights long before current international law and legislation did so.

The President (spoke in French): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lamuel Stanislaus, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada): At the outset, my delegation congratulates Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Commission on the Status of Women and all responsible for the preparation of this twenty-third special session. A global gathering of this composition, size and quality, representing the best in womanhood, provides an opportunity for "Women 2000" to reaffirm women's claim to gender equality in social, political and economic life, especially in the workplace.

Let me suggest here that men of quality should never feel threatened by women for equality, as together we seek to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, while reducing to a minimum the unnecessary, repetitive, obfuscating rhetoric and the political and diplomatic legerdemain, which ought not to dominate this special session. Actions speak louder than words.

Only a few days ago, 31 May, a United Nations publication entitled Progress of the *World's Women 2000* was made public. It shows progress as well as persistent disparities between women and men worldwide, according to United Nations Under-Secretary-General Nitin Desai. The 6 subject areas analysed, out of the 12 contained in the Beijing Platform for Action are health, human rights, political decision-making, work, education and community, population and families.

Due to time constraints, my delegation will touch only briefly on three subject areas: human rights, political decision-making and work.

The Secretary-General put it best when he referred to women's rights as human rights. This is amply borne out in his substantive and far-reaching Millennium Summit report, the outcome of which is eagerly awaited with high expectation.

Similarly, Jane Fonda was right on target when she said that you cannot alleviate poverty, and you cannot create sustainable development, if you do not improve the lives of women.

The underlying theme of this special session, the first of the twenty-first century, is gender equality, which is a human rights issue nationally and internationally. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirms the Charter of the United Nations with respect to the equal rights of men and women and article 23 of the Universal Declaration emphasizes that "everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work."

It is socially wrong and morally unjust that, in the twenty-first century, so much time has to be spent discussing and debating how to implement a basic and fundamental human right, which is rooted in the divine admonition to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the architects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in elucidating the gender equality provision, made the observation that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Much lip-service is given to this universal document, which is regarded by some as a flag to sail under rather than as a rudder to be guided by. Just as a song is not a song until you sing it and a bell is not a bell until you ring it, just so the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is meaningless until you practise it. Is it not incongruous that, more than 50 years after the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the political landscape is still dominated by men, yet all international instruments and all national legislatures enshrine the principle of equality between men and women?

Grenada has initiated a gender perspective in its policies and programmes with respect to gender equality, not only in Government, but in all walks of life. The latest data in United Nations publications show that only nine women are heads of State or Government and that only eight per cent of the world's cabinet ministers are women as of the early part of this century. Sweden is the only country with a majority of women ministers at 55 per cent. My delegation is somewhat pleased, however, to report that, in Grenada, 27 per cent of ministers and members of the Cabinet are women. Worldwide, more progress has been made in the appointment of women to sub-ministerial positions, particularly in the Caribbean and in the developed regions outside Europe, where women account for about 20 per cent. In my country, that figure is 40 per cent.

Women in the year 2000 deserve better representation. They must work together, and work with men of goodwill, to loosen the patriarchal or male

dominance in society, which is so much the poorer without their input. What a waste of talent!

The physical and sexual abuse of women and girls worldwide by men, such as honour killings, beatings, rape, prostitution, abortion and other forms of violation, some not even reported, cry to high Heaven for redress.

In the world of work, women have made some gains and, with some exceptions, comprise one third of the world's labour force by virtue of self-employment, part-time and home-based work. Yet gender imbalance is nowhere more noticeable and keenly felt than in the work place, where, on average, women earn at least 30 per cent less than men for equal work. In the highest echelon in the corporate world, women do not hold positions comparable to their male counterparts.

It is true to say also that women's domestic roles as wives and mothers, which are so vital to the well-being of society, are underpaid and undervalued. Unpaid domestic work everywhere is seen as the woman's responsibility and part of the woman's condition. No wonder two thirds of the world's poor and illiterate are women, giving rise to the new term "feminization of poverty".

In this connection, let me refer to the Lima consensus, which came out of the eighth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Peru. The consensus states that economic globalization, trade liberalization, structural adjustment programmes, external debt and the resulting migration patterns are factors which, among others, can have specific and negative impacts on the lives and situation of women, particularly those of the least economically developed regions, and can cause the dislocation of families, communities and nations.

For the women of the year 2000, I want to recall from Greek mythology the resourcefulness, the common sense and the power of the women of the year 411 BC, during the silly and unnecessary Peloponnesian war between the city-states of Athens and Sparta. The women ended the military madness and exposed the absurdity and futility of war, first by seizing the Acropolis, which contained the treasury, and then by refusing to have intimacies with their returning men and soldiers. Taken together, these actions of seizure and sex-strike on the part of the women of 411 BC, according to the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, which is a masterpiece of comedy, brought peace and development in a century very, very far removed from the twenty-first.

Finally, the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen wrote more than 100 years ago that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. It is the hope of my delegation that the outcome of this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly will demonstrate once and for all that the time has come for Women 2000 and men of quality to make common cause through global and fraternal cooperation in order to secure the rights of women in their entirety, according to conscience, natural law and human rights.

Working and praying together, we are confident that, in leaving here, we will be granted the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Dickson Donigi, Chairman of the delegation of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea): I am quite conscious of the time and will simply outline the historical background of Papua New Guinea's society, look at the constitutional directives of governance as its affects women and human rights, and end by calling for action by our development partners.

I also join others before me in congratulating the President of the General Assembly and his Bureau on their election to their important posts on the occasion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

It is with profound pleasure that I stand here before this body to declare my Government's and my personal support for gender equality and the creation of opportunities for women. I say it is a personal commitment because it appears that, in my household, I am very much a minority. There is a six-to-one ratio, definitely slanted against me in every respect. For clarity, my wife and I have five daughters. But I enjoy every moment of the trials and tribulations facing my immediate family and I could not ask for better.

In Papua New Guinea society, a Melanesian chief is expected to set an example in upholding and enforcing customary laws among clan members. Some customary laws may seem to the Western eye very archaic and to need replacement by Western values and standards. Others may be justifiable on the grounds that they have served our people for over 40,000 years and so why should we change because some outsider has told us to do so?

Our ancestors were the first people to settle the Pacific Islands, apart from the Australian Aboriginal people. The Islands were settled over a 40,000-year period. The last great migration was by people of European descent, as recently as the last century, to Australia and New Zealand, French Polynesia and New Caledonia. Each wave of immigrants into the Pacific introduced new ideas, methods of work and styles of living. The Pacific way of life and, for that matter, Papua New Guinea have been very much influenced by new waves of people and ideas over time, and so this trend will continue.

There is, however, one difference. The change over the last 40,000 years was gradual, but the one that has taken place over the last 10 to 20 years has been drastic — the result of new and faster ways of communication. The space age has transformed a society which was in the Stone Age 75 years ago and propelled it into a fast-moving age of computer and space technology. Papua New Guineans are exposed to over 20 television channels from around the world. Papua New Guineans, who 75 years ago were using stone tools, are now using modern tools and accept technological changes more readily than was previously thought possible.

Papua New Guineans are now able to learn foreign languages, increase their computer literacy and operate space-age technological machinery. The pace of change in my country is therefore far faster, in the space of one or two generations, than in the previous 40,000 years.

We are, however, able to report that what is contained in the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action for women was already foreseen by Papua New Guinean politicians when they drafted and adopted the Constitution of Papua New Guinea in 1975, some 20 years before the Beijing Platform.

For instance, the Constitution of Papua New Guinea contains what is generally called the National Goals and Directive Principles. These are guiding principles of governance. While they are not enforceable per se in a court of law, it is a requirement that all constitutional laws affecting the rights of the individual must have a reference point in these Goals and Principles. The second National Goal provides for the equality of all citizens and directs that opportunities must be created for all citizens to participate actively in the political, social and educational advancement and economic activities in the country. The Constitution, in furtherance of these National Goals and Directive Principles, created a number of constitutional rights which are absolute, and a number of others which are not absolute but can be regulated by a law that complies with certain preconditions.

Absolute rights include the right to life. There is, however, one qualifier. It is permissible to officially take someone's life in the implementation of a law that imposes penalties for criminal conduct. Accordingly, the question of the right to life is sacrosanct under our Constitution. Abortion, then, is a crime under our criminal law system.

Other constitutional rights include the right to hold public office, the right to equal opportunities for employment, the right to join unions and other non-governmental organizations, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and publication of information, and so on.

The Constitution also recognizes that the Papua New Guinea society is based on the family unit, and that it is the family unit that must be strengthened. The proper implementation of this Directive Principle in our Constitution will mean that the exercise of individual rights must be for the benefit and the strengthening of the family unit. This prime objective runs counter to the western philosophy of individual rights. We will continue to back every scheme and policy which supports the family unit as the basis of the Papua New Guinea society and nation. The primacy of individual rights breaks down the family unit, creates social discord and disharmony and leads to the breakdown of State services.

Thus it can be said that Papua New Guineans enjoy many constitutional rights that are not available in some of our Member States. The Government has adopted many strategies and revised them on many occasions in an effort to implement the National Goals and Directive Principles.

These policies look good on paper. So what then is the problem with Papua New Guinea? It has a low level of education for women and girl children, a high mortality rate, a high incidence of crimes against women, an increasing incidence of women with confirmed HIV/AIDS, and a pitiful participation of women in politics, in senior Government positions and in the business sector. Yes, we have seen those United Nations reports in respect to Papua New Guinea. They do look pitiful for a country with so much in the way of mineral resources.

However, Papua New Guinea has made some progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the areas of education, health, agriculture, environment and other social sectors, with assistance from our regional and international partners. More needs to be done in this particular area.

The problem is simply this. We as a developing country need development partners which are prepared to walk with us instead of dictating to us. We need to develop strategic long-term plans to change the ingrained social structure that has been developed over 40,000 years and substitute it with one that is generally acceptable to the community as a whole, taking into account the changing circumstances of our country. While it is true that the Constitution also recognizes and gives effect to our customary laws as they existed before we became an independent nation, it is also true to say that customary law is not static — it is a living law. It changes over time due to outside influences. Once the resilience of the Papua New Guinea society has been recognized, it may then be possible to develop a plan of action which will over time have an influence on and change customary norms. What is the most likely catalyst for change? The answer is very simple: education.

The Government of Papua New Guinea therefore gives high priority to education. However, every year 50,000 children at the primary-education level in Papua New Guinea cannot find places at high schools and become what we call school dropouts. They are not dropouts by choice. In fact, a high percentage of them have above-average school aptitudes. The problem is lack of schools and teachers. The problem is not one of gender. It is a general problem that affects every Papua New Guinean child who aspires to a higher and appropriate education.

Papua New Guineans do not need to reinvent the wheel. We came from the Stone Age. We did not have to use a horse-drawn cart; we adapted and went straight into the age of computer science and technology, and we will continue to make great strides if only we are given the appropriate opportunity and assistance.

I therefore have only one plea to our development partners: invest in Papua New Guinea's educational system. Education is a tool for the emancipation of women all over the world. Education is a tool for changing the behavioural patterns and attitudes of men and boy children towards women and girl children. Education will ensure women's health-care needs, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Education reduces the illiteracy rate. Education will lead to shared-decision making. Education leads to economic empowerment and opens up employment opportunities. Education strengthens human rights. In short, education teaches respect for human dignity, motherhood and family. Education must be a development tool.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.